

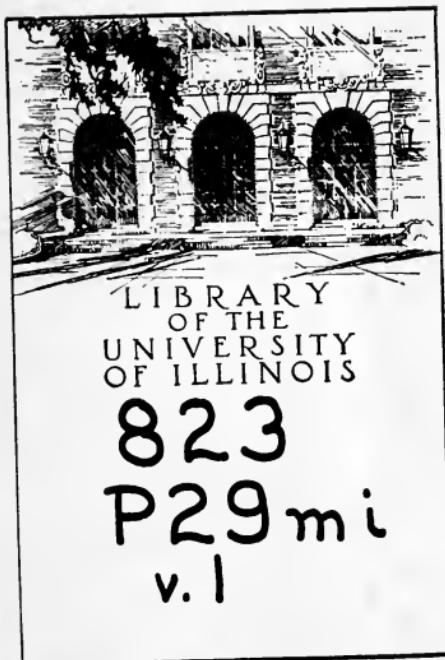
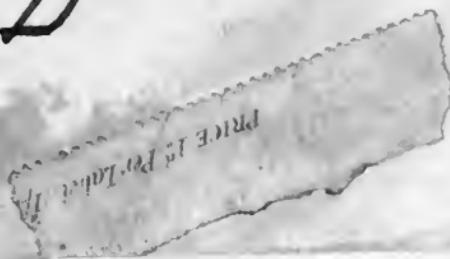
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MIRK ABBEY.

VOL. I.

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M I R K A B B E Y.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

“LOST SIR MASSINGBERD;”

“THE CLYFFARDS OF CLYFFE;”

&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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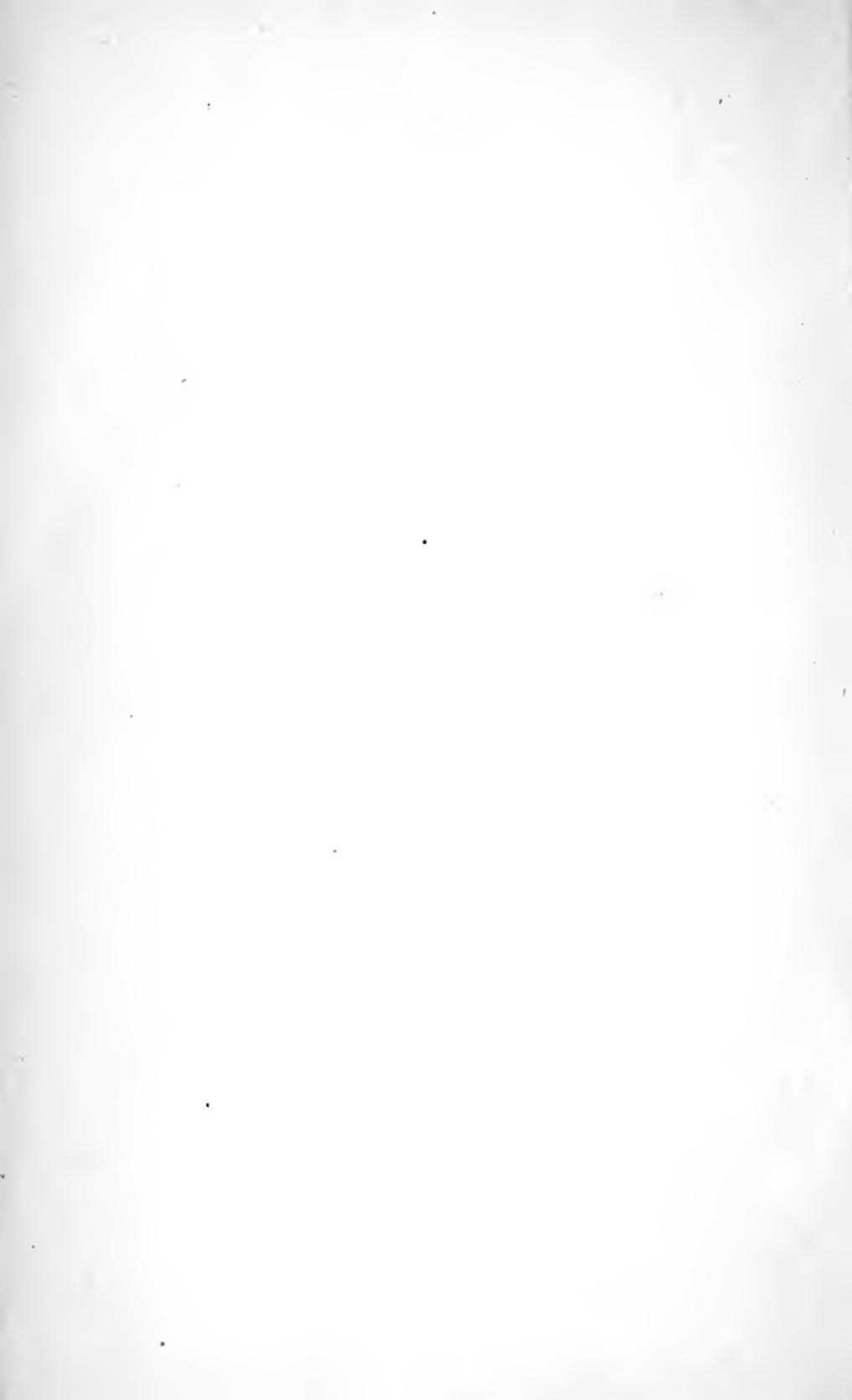
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TO

Charles Dickens,

THIS BOOK IS, BY PERMISSION,

Cordially Dedicated.



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OF
THE FIRST VOLUME.

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CHAPTER I.

IN MY LADY'S CHAMBER.

IT is an hour short of midnight, and the depth of winter. The morrow is Christmas Day. Mirk Abbey bears snow everywhere; inches thick upon its huge broad coping-stones; much even on its sloping roof, save on the side where the north wind makes fitful rushes, and, wolf-like, tears and worries the white fleeces. Mirk woods sway mournfully their naked arms, and grind and moan without; the ivy taps unceasingly against the pane, as though entreating shelter.

The whole earth lies cold and dead beneath its snow-shroud, and yet the snow falls and falls, flake by flake, soft and noiseless in its white malice, like a woman's hate upon her rival.

It hides the stars, it dims the moon, it dulls the murmur of the river to which the Park slopes down, and whose voice the frost has striven in vain to hush these three weeks. Only the Christmas-bells are heard, now faint, now full—that sound more laden with divine regret than any other that falls on human ear. Like one who, spurring from the battle-field, proclaims “The fight is ours, but our great chief is slain!” there is sorrow in that message of good tidings; and not only for pious Christian folk; in every bosom it stirs some sleeping memory, and reminds it of the days that are no more. No wonder, then, that such music

should touch my Lady's heart—the widowed mistress of Mirk Abbey. Those Christmas-bells which are also wedding-bells, remind her doubtless of the hour when Sir Robert lifted her lace-veil aside, and kissed her brow before all the people in the little church by the sea, and called her for the first time his Wife. He will never do so more. He has been dead for years. But what of that? Our dead are with us still. Our acts, our dealings with the world, form but a portion of our lives; our thoughts still dwell with those dear ones who have gone home before us, and in our dreams they still are our companions. My Lady is not alone in her private chamber, although no human being is there besides herself. Her eyes are fixed upon the fire, and in its flame she sees a once-loved face invisible to others, whose smile has power to move her even to tears. How foolish

are those who ascribe romance to Youth alone —to Youth, that has scarcely learned to love, far less to lose! My Lady is five-and-forty at the least, although still comely; and yet there are memories at work within that broad white brow, which, for interest and pathos, outweigh the fancies of a score of girls. Even so far as we—the world—are acquainted with her past, it is a strange one, and may well give her that thoughtful air.

Lady Lisgard, of Mirk Abbey, has looked at life from a far other station than that which she now occupies. When a man of fortune does not materially increase his property by marriage, we call the lady of his choice, although she may have a few thousand pounds of her own, “a girl without a sixpence.” But Sir Robert Lisgard did literally make a match of this impecunious sort. Moreover, he married

a very “unsuitable young person ;” by which expression you will understand that he was blamed, not for choosing a bride very much junior to himself, but for not selecting her from the proper circles. When accidentally interrogated by blundering folks respecting her ancestry, the baronet used good-humouredly to remark, that his wife was the daughter of Neptune and Thetis. When asked for her maiden name, he would reply drily : “ She was a Miss Anna Dyomene ;” for the simple fact was, that she had been thrown up almost at his feet by the sea—the sole survivor of a crowded emigrant-ship that went to pieces before his eyes while he was staying one stormy autumn at a sea-side village in the South. Lashed to a spar, the poor soul came ashore one terrible night in a very insufficient costume, so as to excite the liveliest compas-

sion in all beholders. There was a subscription got up among some visitors of fashion to supply her with a wardrobe; and they do say that Sir Robert Lisgard's name is still to be seen set down with the rest of the benevolent donors, for five pounds, in the list that is kept among the archives of the village post-office.

But it was not until three years afterwards that he bought her a *trousseau*; for the baronet, intending to make her his wife not only in name—a companion for life, and not a play-thing, which is prized so long as it is new, and no longer—caused Lucy Gavestone, during the greater part of that interval, to be educated for her future position. If it was madness in him, as many averred, to marry so far beneath him, there was much method in his madness. Not ashamed of her as a bride, he was resolved

not to be ashamed of her as the mistress of his house, or as the mother of his children, if it should please Heaven to grant him issue. It was in France, folks said, that her Ladyship acquired those manners which subsequently so excited the envy of the midland county in which she lived. She bore the burden of the honours unto which she was not born as gracefully as the white rose in her blue-black hair. But to perform her loving duties as a mother, in the way even her enemies admitted that she did perform them, could scarcely have been learned in France. Only love and natural good sense could have taught her those. Never once had Sir Robert Lisgard cause to regret the gift which the sea had given him. He used, however, smilingly to remark, in his later years —and his words were not without their pathos then—that he wished that he could have

married his Lucy earlier, and while he was yet a young man ; but in that case she would have been fitter for the font than the altar, inasmuch as there was a quarter of a century between their respective ages. He always averred that five-and-twenty years of his manhood had been thrown away.

But good wife and matron as Lady Lisgard had been, she was no less excellent a widow and mother. If Sir Robert could have risen from that grave in Mirk churchyard, where he had preferred to lie, rather than in the family vault, so that she might come to visit him in his lonely sleep, and daily lay a flower or two, culled with her own hands, upon him—not perhaps unconscious of that loving service—he would have found all things at the Abbey as he would have wished them to be during life : that is, so far as she could

keep them so. Sir Richard, their eldest son, was within a few months of his majority, and, of course, had become in a great degree his own master; not that he misused his years so as to place himself in opposition to his mother, for he was a gentleman above everything; but he was of a disposition more haughty and stern than her kindly nature could well cope with, and she nervously shrank from any contest with it, although, on a question of principle—which, however, had not occurred—she might have braved even him.

Walter Lisgard, the younger son, was as genial and good-humoured as his father before him, and although (in common with every one who knew her) I loved and respected my Lady, it must be confessed that he was too openly his mother's favourite, as he was the

favourite of all at Mirk, in the Abbey or out of it.

Lastly, there was Letty Lisgard—but she shall speak for her sweet self. While her mother sits and thinks before her fire, there is a knock at the chamber-door, and on the instant the picture in her brain dissolves, which was affecting her so deeply, and she has no eyes save for her only daughter. A girl of seventeen enters the room, not gaily, as would have become her age, but with a certain gentle gravity that becomes her at least as well, since it is impossible to imagine that she could look more lovely. Fair as a lily, but not pale, for her usually delicate colour is heightened by some mental emotion, which causes, too, the little diamond cross upon her bosom to rise and fall, and the hazel eyes to melt and glitter beneath their dark

lashes; lithe and tall as a sapling wooed too roughly by the north wind, she glides in, with her fair head slightly bowed, and casting herself upon her knees beside my Lady, exclaims: "Ah, do not weep, dear mother—do not weep!" at the same time herself bursting into a passion of tears. "I knew what you would be thinking of," continues she, "upon this sad night, and therefore I came to comfort you a little, if I could. If not a merry Christmas, let me at least wish you a happy one, my own dear mother. I am sure that if dear papa can see us now, he wishes you the same."

"Yes, dearest Letty, that is true. How thoughtful and kind it was of you to leave your friend—breaking off, no doubt, some pleasant chat over school-days"—

"Nay, mother," interrupted the girl; "what

is Rose to me in comparison with you? Was it likely that I should forget this anniversary of our common loss!"

Lady Lisgard did not answer in words, but shedding by the wealth of golden brown hair that had fallen over her daughter's forehead, she kissed that pure brow tenderly. Upon her own cheeks, a crimson flush, called thither by the young girl's words, was lingering yet. Reader, happy are you if you have never known a loving voice say: "What are you thinking of, dearest?" expecting to receive the answer: "Of you," when you have no such reply to give—when your mind has been wandering far from that trustful being, and perhaps even whither it should not have wandered. Such a flush may then have visited your cheeks, as now touched those of Lady Lisgard, although it is certain that

memory never played *her* so false as to remind her of aught whereof she need have been ashamed. The fact was, she had not been thinking of Sir Robert at all, albeit it was upon that very day, five years back, that she had received from his failing hand its last loving pressure, and in that very room. Human nature cannot be trained like those wondrous mechanical inventions of the monks, that indicated the fasts and festivals of the church so accurately—to suffer or rejoice at particular times and seasons; we are often sad when the jest is upon our lips, and bear a light heart beneath the sackcloth. Lady Lisgard's thoughts had, Heaven knew, been far from merry ones; but because she had not been mourning with chronological propriety, her woman's heart unjustly smote her with a sense of want of fealty to the memory

of him for whom she still wore—and intended to wear to her dying day—the visible tokens of regret.

It is the fashion to jeer at widows ; but, to a reverent mind, there are few things more touching than that frequent sight in honest England—a widowed mother, whose only joy seems to be in what remains to her of her dead lover, husband, counsellor—his children ; and the only grief that has power to wring whose heart, past sense of common pain through the dread anguish that it has once undergone, arises from their misfortunes and misdoings. Ah, selfish boy, beware how you still further burden that sorrow-laden soul !—ah, thoughtless girl, exchange not that faithful breast too hastily for one that may spurn your head in the hour of need !

My Lady—for that was what we always

called her about Mirk—was neither more nor less fortunate with her children than most mothers. They all three loved her; but they did not all love one another. Between Sir Richard and Walter was only a year of time, but upon it had arisen a thousand quarrels. The former thought that the privilege of an elder brother was a divine right, extending over every circumstance of fraternal life; the latter conceived it to be an immoral institution, borrowed in an evil hour from the Jews, and one to be strictly kept within its peculiar limits—themselves more than sufficiently comprehensive—the inheritance of the family title, and the succession to the landed estates.

“Where are Richard and Walter, Letty?” asked Lady Lisgard, breaking a long silence. “They, too, have been always mindful, like yourself, of this sad day.”

“They are mindful still, dear mother. I hear Walter’s foot in the corridor even now.”

A swift elastic footfall it was, such as is very suggestive of the impulsive nature of him who uses it; for a phlegmatic man may move swiftly on rare occasions—such as bayonets behind him, or a mad bull—but there will be no more elasticity in his gait, even then, than in that of a walking-doll; whereas every step of Captain Walter Lisgard had a double action, a rise and fall in it, independent of the progressive motion altogether.

He was of a slim, yet not delicate build; his every movement (and, as I have said, there was plenty of it) had a native grace like that of a child; childlike and trustful, too, were those blue eyes; soft in their expression as his sister’s, while he stooped down to kiss his

mother's cheek, scarce more smooth than his own. Upon his lip, however, was a fairy moustache, which being, fortunately, coal-black like his somewhat close-cropped hair, made itself apparent to all beholders, and rescued his comeliness from downright effeminity. But no woman ever owned a softer voice, or could freight it with deeper feeling than Walter Lisgard.

“God bless you, dearest mother, and give you all the good you deserve!” murmured he tenderly.

“And God bless *you*, my darling!” answered Lady Lisgard, holding him at the full distance of her white and rounded arms, clasped with two costly jewels, which had a worth, however, in her eyes far beyond their price, being Sir Robert's wedding-gift. “Ah me! how you remind me of your father's picture, Watty,

taken on the day when he came of age. I trust you will grow up to be like him in other respects, dear boy."

"I hope so, mother; although," added he, with a sudden petulance, "there will be a vast difference between us in some things, you know. He was an only son, whereas I am not even an eldest one; and when *I* come of age, there will be no picture taken, nor any fuss made, such as is to happen in June, I hear, upon Richard's majority."

"Walter, Walter!" exclaimed Lady Lisgard reprovingly, "this is not like yourself, for it's envious—and—and—covetous!"—

"At all events, it is very foolish, mother," interrupted the young man drily; "for what can't be cured must be endured."

"And very, very cruel to me," added Lady Lisgard.

“Then I am sincerely sorry I spoke,” returned Walter hastily, the moodiness upon his features chased away at once by loving regret. “Only, when a fellow leaves his regiment to spend Christmas-eve at home—as I am sure I was delighted to do, so far as you and Letty were concerned—he does not want to find there another commanding officer, uncommissioned and self-appointed”

“Walter, Walter! this is very sad,” broke in Lady Lisgard piteously: “you know what is Richard’s manner, and how much less kind it is than his true meaning. Can you not make some allowance for your own brother?”

“That’s exactly what I said to *him*, mother,” answered Walter, laughing bitterly. “Here have I just got my troop, with no more to keep myself on than when I was a cornet, and had no back debts to speak of; and yet, so far

from helping me a little, as Richard might easily do, by *making some allowance for his own brother*, he complains of that which you are so good as to let me have out of your own income. Why, that's not *his* business, if it were twice as much—although, I am sure, dear mother, you are liberality itself. Has he not got enough of his own—and of what should be mine and Letty's here, by rights—with-
out grudging me your benevolences? Is he not Sir Richard Lisgard of Mirk Abbey?"—

"I will not listen to this, Walter," cried his mother sternly. "This is mere mean jealousy of your elder brother."

"Oh, dear no, mother; indeed, it is not that," answered the young man coldly. "I envy him nothing. I hold him superior to me in no respect whatever; and that is exactly why I will not submit to his dictation. Here he

comes stalking along the gallery, as though conscious that every foot of oak belongs to him, and every picture on the wall."

It was undoubtedly a firm determined step enough—unusually so, for one so young as Sir Richard. The face of the new-comer, too, was stern almost to harshness; and as he entered the room, and beheld Walter standing by his mother's side, his features seemed to stiffen into stone. A fine face, too; more aristocratic if not so winning as his younger brother's, and not without considerable sagacity: if his manner was not graceful, it had a high chivalric air about it which befitted his haughty person very well. When he taught himself submission (a rare lesson with him), as now, while he raised his mother's fingers to his lips, and kissed them with dutiful devotion, it would have been hard to find a

man with a more noble presence than Richard Lisgard.

“A merry Christmas and a happy New Year to you, mother.” The words, though conventional, had an earnest kindness, which came from the heart. Lady Lisgard kissed him fondly.

“Thank you, dear Richard,” said she; “but, alas! no Christmas can be a merry one, no year a happy one, when I see my children disagree.”

“Ah, Master Walter has been here before me, I see,” quoth Sir Richard bitterly, “stealing, like Jacob, his mother’s blessing from her first-born, and giving his own account of matters. But please now to listen to *my* version.”

“Not to-night, Richard,” exclaimed Lady Lisgard with deep emotion. “Let not to-

night, sacred to the memory of your common father, be a witness to your mutual accusations. In this room, almost at this very hour, but a few years back, he died, bequeathing you with his last breath to my tenderest care. Here it was that you kissed his white lips, weary with prayers for your future welfare; here it was that you promised, in return, to be good and dutiful sons. I know—I think, at least—that you both love your mother. No, I will kiss neither of you while thus unreconciled. That was not all that he required of you: he would have bidden you, could he have looked forward to this evil time, to love one another also; and O Richard! O Walter! hark to those bells, that seem to strive to beat their message into the most stubborn ears. Do you not hear what they say?—Letty, dear, do you tell them, then,

for there are no lips better suited to deliver it."

The young girl lifted up her head from her mother's lap, to gaze into her eyes ; then, with exquisite pathos and softness, repeated, like a silver peal of bells : " Peace and good-will, peace and good-will, peace and good-will to all mankind."

Sir Richard looked at his brother fixedly, but no longer in wrath. " It is my part to make the first advance," said he, " although I was not the first to quarrel ;" and he frankly stretched forth his hand.

The other paused a second ; then reading on his mother's anxious lips : " For *my* sake, Walter," he grasped his brother's fingers. There was grace in the very delay, as in the motion tenderness and genial ease, but scarcely the warmth of reconciliation. It was more

like the action of a woman who wishes to please ; and if you had seen the small hand apart from its owner, as it lay with its one glittering ring half hid in the other's huge white palm, you would have said it was a woman's hand.

CHAPTER II.

THE WAITS.

ONCE more my Lady is alone, except for her companion-thoughts, which are, however, no longer of a distressing nature. The reconcilement of her boys has gladdened her to the core: she thinks, she trusts at least, that the truce will be a lasting peace. As for Letty, she is all that a mother's heart could wish her to be. If much is lost to my Lady, surely much remains. With the Poor, one misery is removed only to bring another into greater prominence; but with the Rich,

this is not so. Only let the disease be cured, or the quarrel be made up, which is at present vexing them, and all, for a time at least, is sunshine. Even not to be cold, not to be hungry, is something; and not to have to take thought of the morrow is a great deal. From her warm and curtained chamber, Lady Lisgard looks forth into the night. The snow falls as fast as ever, now straight, now aslant, now whirled in circular eddies by the bitter north. Through its thick and shifting veil, she can scarcely see the old church-tower of Mirk, though it stands close by within the very garden-grounds of the Abbey; nor the windmill which crowns Mirkland Hill, and on moonlit nights stands up so clear against the sky, a beacon to all the country round. It was weather which those who are armed against it call “Seasonable;” and some of

the tender sex, who have a fire lit in their rooms before they rise, and go out in seal-skin, and travel with foot-warmers, even go so far as to call “Delightful.” At all events, it is such as is pleasant to watch from within for a few moments, and then to return to one’s fireside with enhanced satisfaction.

There are merry-makings in the kitchen to-night, as befits the season, and my Lady’s maid has been enjoined not to hurry herself. Her mistress is beginning to unrobe, without her assistance, but very leisurely. She unclasps one warm and sparkling jewel from her arm, and gazes thoughtfully, but far from sadly, upon the picture that is hid within it. It is the miniature of a handsome man past middle age, attired in a blue coat and gold buttons; what persons of my Lady’s age would call a decidedly old-fashioned portrait;

but it is the likeness of Sir Robert as her bridegroom. "What a good, kind husband he was," thinks she. "How he loved me, and loaded me with favours; how much he overlooked, how much he forgot—of which others know nothing—for my sake. How terrible would it be to feel that one had not done one's poor duty in return for so much love. Thank Heaven, I feel free from any such charge. If I had not love—that is, first love—to give him in exchange, I gave him all I had. I gave him genuine affection, esteem—worship. Everybody knows that; and what is better, my own heart knows it. It never beat with truer fealty towards him than it beats to-night. God knows. I live for his children only. What a fine noble boy is Richard grown; surely, to look upon him, and to say to one's self: 'This is my

son,' should be happiness enough for any mother. True, he is proud; but has he not something to be proud of? He, Sir Richard, and one of those Lisgards who have ruled at Mirk for twelve generations. (Here a quiet smile stole over my Lady's features.) They said with reason at those *tableaux* at the Vanes, that with that helmet on he was the image of young Sir Maurice, who died at Edgehill with the colours twisted round him. I wonder if it was his poor mother who had her dead boy painted so. 'Tis certain that she thought: 'Ah, were he but alive, there would be no such thing as sorrow more for me.' Yet here I have him. Ah (here she grew as pale as death), why did *I* ever let my Walter be a soldier? What weakness to give way—to the very peril of him for whom I was so weak! He would have gone

to the wars themselves but for good Dr Haldane, through whom (thanks to the Duke) he was not gazetted to the corps he had applied for. Why did he not choose the bar, like his elder brother? How he would have moved men's hearts to mercy with that winning tongue! Or why did he not become God's messenger—I am sure he has an angel's face—and carry the news those bells are telling of to shipwrecked souls? Oftentimes, when, as a child, he knelt beside me to say his prayers, his very looks have seemed to make the action more sacred. Goodness seemed better worth when he was praying for it, and heaven no home for saints unless he shared it! God grant he may grow up a good man!

“Then Letty, too—what mother's wealth must I possess since that sweet girl is not

the chief of it, the central jewel of my crown ? When matched with others of her age—with this Rose Aynton, for example—how bright and fair she shews ! Not but that Rose is a good girl, doubtless ; accomplished, too, beyond her years, and far beyond her opportunities—she sparkles like a crystal cut in ten thousand facets ; but my own Letty is the flawless diamond, bright and pure as light itself. What blessings are these three ! May Heaven keep them always as I deem them now. I wish my Walter were a little less impulsive ; but the darling boy is young. As for dear Richard, I have no fears for him. The proud lad will find some noble helpmate, meet to— Great Heaven ! what is that ? ”

A burst of melody without fell suddenly upon the midnight air, and at the same moment the chamber-door opened to the touch

of Mistress Forest, her Ladyship's confidential maid. "I beg your pardon, my Lady, if I startled you; but I knocked twice, and could not make you hear."

"It was not you, Mary, that startled me," returned Lady Lisgard; "it was the sudden music. The Christmas Waits, as I suppose?"

"Yes, my Lady. They came up from the village a little while ago, and have been staying in the servants-hall for the clock to strike twelve."

"I trust they have all had supper?"

"You may be sure of that, my Lady. Mrs Welsh is as openhanded (with your Ladyship's property) as any cook in the county; nor is George Steve a likely man to sit thirsty while he sees others drink. One would think that a public-housekeeper should have drinking enough at home; but—pardon, my Lady—I

am making complaints which, however just, I know you dislike to hear, and, besides, I am interrupting the carol."

Earthly friends will change and falter,

Earthly hearts will vary ;

He is born that cannot alter,

Of the Virgin Mary.

Born to-day—

Raise the lay ;

Born to-day—

Twine the bay.

Jesus Christ is born to suffer,

Born for you—born for you ;

Holly, strew :

Jesus Christ was born to conquer,

Born to save—born to save ;

Laurel, wave :

Jesus Christ was born to govern,

Born a king—born a king ;

Bay-wreaths, bring :

Jesus Christ was born of Mary,

Born for all. Well befall Hearth and Hall.

Here the manly but not unmelodious voices exchanged their verse for prose, if Christmas good-wishes can be said to be mere prose. “A merry Christmas and a happy New Year to your Ladyship, and many on ‘em !”

Lady Lisgard moved to the window with a smile, and drawing the curtain aside, threw up the sash. On the white lawn beneath, stood five dark figures, bearing various instruments of music, and one a huge horn lantern, the light of which glinted upon the laurels. It was impossible to recognise the features of the rest, as they stood, cap in hand, notwithstanding the still driving snow, awaiting her Ladyship’s reply ; but she addressed them each by name nevertheless.

“ Mr Steve, I thank you kindly. Henry Ash, I am glad to find you in good voice again. John Lewis and Peter Stone—if I am not

mistaken. Neighbours and friends all, I thank you very much. But it is a cold night for caroling, and I hope you have been taken care of within. A merry Christmas to you and a happy New Year." There was a tremor in my Lady's voice, although she spoke with such particularity, which shewed how deeply she was moved.

"God bless your Ladyship," returned the voices, disorderly as to unison, but each one of itself distinct and clear as file-firing.—"God bless Sir Richard, and send him a fair bride.—God bless Master Walter's handsome face.—God bless Miss Letty."

Lady Lisgard closed the window, but as she did so, dropped the heavy curtain between herself and the lighted chamber, so that she could still look out, but without being seen. The curtain, too, cut her off from the observa-

tion of her maid within. "Who is the fifth man that bears the lantern, Mary?" asked her Ladyship in a tone of carelessness very unsuited to the expression of her face, which all in a moment had grown pinched and terror-stricken, as though it hungered for some reply that it yet dreaded to hear.

"Nobody as you know, my Lady—nor indeed as *I* know, for the matter of that. He's a stranger in these parts, who's putting up at the *Lisgard Arms*. He only came for a few days last week, walking across the country for all the world like a pedler—a way he says he learned in foreign parts; but Steve with his odd ways has taken his fancy, so that he stays on. A very well-spoken sort of person he is too, although the sea, it seems, has been his calling, which is a rough trade. However, he has made it answer—according at least to Mr

Steve. Any way, he flings his money about free enough, and indeed is what *I* call rather too fond of treating folks. He is good company himself, they say, and a favourite with everybody he comes across, which is a very dangerous thing—that is,” added Mistress Forest, correcting herself, “unless one is a gentleman, like handsome Master Walter.”

“ You don’t—remember—this—this person’s name, Mary, do you ? ” asked Lady Lisgard.

“ No, strange to say, I don’t, my Lady; although but a moment ago it was on the tip of my tongue. It is something like Hathaway.”

A trace of colour once more returns to my Lady’s cheek, and her breath, which, by reason perhaps of the confined space in which she stands, has seemed to be stifled during the narration of her maid, now comes and goes with a little less of effort.

“ That is his voice, I reckon, my Lady—yes, I thought so—and the new carol which he has been teaching the choir.”

O'er the hill and o'er the vale
Come three kings together,
Caring nought for snow and hail,
Cold, and wind, and weather ;
Now on Persia's sandy plains,
Now where Tigris swells with rains,
They their camels tether.
Now through Syrian lands they go,
Now through Moab, faint and slow,
Now o'er Edom's heather.

“ Ah, now I've got it, my Lady,” cried Mistress Forest triumphantly. “ It isn't Hathaway. He's the man they were talking of in the servants-hall as has just bought the windmill of old Daniels, and that was how I confused them. The stranger's name is Derrick—a Mr Derrick.”

My Lady's dimpled hand flew to her heart, and would have pressed against it had she had any strength to do so. Her limbs, however, were nerveless, and shook as if she had the ague. But for the window-seat, she must have dropped; and as it was, leaned, huddled up against it, a shapeless form, decked in gray satin and pearls indeed, but as unlike my Lady as those poor wretches whom we strangle for a show are unlike themselves, who seem to lose, the instant that the fatal bolt is drawn, all fellowship with the human, and become mere bundles of clothes. The drop had fallen, and without warning, from under Lady Lisgard's feet, but unhappily the victim was conscious, and not dead.

CHAPTER III.

ONLY “THE HEART.”

IGNORANT of the ruin it had wrought, the rich full voice of the stranger still rang forth, manifestly to the admiration of the confidential maid, since her nimble tongue failed to interrupt its melody. She was not displeased that her lady too was listening with such unbroken attention, and probably also looking out upon the singer; for Mr Derrick was a very “proper man”—at all events in external appearance—and had shewn himself in the servants-

hall a while ago by no means unconscious of the personal charms of Mistress Forest, which, although mature, were still by no means despicable. A few years younger than my Lady herself, Mary had been treated by Time at least with equal courtesy ; her figure was plump, her eyes were bright, her voice, which, if not absolutely musical, could reach some very high notes, and upon occasion, was clear and cheery. One would have said she would have been too talkative to have suited my Lady's grave and quiet ways ; but this was not so. Lady Lisgard had that blessed gift of being able not to listen unless it pleased her to do so, which enables so many conscientious persons to speak favourably of sermons ; all the avalanche of her maid's eloquence passed clean over her head, and suffered her to pursue her own

meditations at the easy tribute of an appreciating nod when all was ended. Even had she been much more inconvenienced by the *débris* of words, her tormentor would have been freely forgiven. The affection between mistress and maid was deep and genuine, and had extended over more than half their lifetime.

Mary Forest was the daughter of a fisherman at Coveton, the village on whose sandy beach Sir Robert had picked up his bride. To old Jacob Forest's cottage, the human flotsam and jetsam had been conveyed, and upon Mary, then almost a child, had much of its tending at first devolved. The kindly little nurse soon won the regard of her patient, cut off by that one night's storm from kith and kin, for this emigrant ship had contained all that were near or dear to her on earth,

and ready as a babe to clasp the tendrils of love about whoever shewed her kindness. Removed from the cottage to the rectory, where the clergyman and his wife welcomed her very hospitably, first, as a poor human waif, that claimed some lodgment ere she could decide upon her future calling, for a short time after that as their nursery governess, and finally as guest and inmate pending those arrangements of her betrothed husband which subsequently took her to France, Lucy Gavestone—for that was the name by which my Lady was then known—did not forget little Mary and her loving ministrations. She asked and easily obtained permission of Sir Robert that the girl should accompany her to the semi-scholastic establishment at Dijon in which he had decided to place her previous to their marriage. This she

accordingly did ; and many a strange reminiscence unshared by others (itself a great knitter of the bond of friendship) had mistress and maid in common. The fortunes of the latter of course rose with those of the former, and of all the household at Mirk Abbey there was none in higher trust than Mary Forest, nor more certain of the envied position she held, since the affection of my Lady set her above the machinations of that Nemesis of favourite servants, a Domestic Cabal. Those natural enemies, the butler and the cook, had even shaken hands together for the purpose of compassing Mary's downfall, but their combined endeavours had only obtained for a reward her sovereign forgiveness and (I am afraid I must add) contempt.

In a word, Mary Forest was as happy in

her circumstances as any woman at her time of life could expect to be whose title of "Mistress" was only brevet rank. She had subjugated many other male folks beside the butler (the ancient coachman, for example, with the back view of whose broad shoulders and no neck the Lisgard family had been familiar for half a century), but such victories had not at all been owing to her charms. By them, hitherto, Man had been an unconquered animal, and this was the knot in the otherwise smooth surface of Mary's destiny which no amount of planing (within *her* philosophy) could make even. She had been wooed, of course (what woman of twoscore, according to her own account, has not?), but hitherto the suitors had not been eligible, or her own ideas had been too ambitious. The time had now arrived with her when com-

promise begins to be expedient, and high expectations abate. Matrimonial opportunities at the Abbey were few and far between. She had not received such marked attention from anybody for months as this stranger, living upon his own means at the *Lisgard Arms*, had paid her that very night in the servants-hall. No wonder, then, that while he sang, she should for once be content to be a listener.

O'er the hill and o'er the vale
Each king bears a present ;
Wise men go a child to hail,
Monarchs seek a peasant ;
And a star in front proceeds,
Over rocks and rivers leads,
Shines with beams incessant.
Therefore onward, onward still,
Ford the stream, and climb the hill—
Love makes all things pleasant.

“There, now, I call that very pretty, my Lady,” exclaimed Mistress Forest, as the last cadence died away; “and a very pretty sentiment at the end—‘Love makes all things pleasant;’ although, for my part, I know nothing about *that*, thank Heaven, and prefer to be my own mistress—that is, with the exception of your Ladyship, to obey whom is a labour of love. I am sure there are few husbands for whom I would give up such a service as yours, my Lady. I wish Mr What’s-his-name—dear me, how stupid of me—ah, Derrick! It’s rather a pretty name too; don’t you think so, my Lady? I wish this Mr Derrick would sing us another song. He has a very beautiful voice, and I am sure his expression—don’t you think so, my Lady? Ahem. No; I hear them moving off. Well, he will be in the choir to-morrow

morning, that's sure. Had you not better come to the fire, my—— Ah, great Heaven! Mistress, my dear darling mistress, what is the matter? Let me ring for help!"

It was impossible to misunderstand my Lady's "No," although it was not articulate. Huddled up, as I have said, in the space between the curtain and the window-seat, white and cold as the snow without, voiceless and almost breathless as her maid found her upon venturing to draw aside the heavy damask folds between them, such a look of agonised apprehension yet shot from her eyes as at once to prevent Mistress Forest from putting her design with respect to the bell into effect; nay, more, having assisted my Lady to the sofa, she rightly interpreted a second glance in the direction of the door, to mean "Lock it," and this she did even

before arranging the cushions, which would have been the first action with most persons of her class. Mary Forest, although a babbler, was no fool, and she perceived immediately that the distress which was agitating her beloved mistress was at least as much mental as physical. Once before, and only once, she had known my Lady to be what females call “overcome”—that was upon the eve of her marriage with Sir Robert; there was much similarity between the two attacks, but the present was far more violent. In the first instance, she had been told by her Ladyship that it was owing to “the heart,” which was fitting enough under her then circumstances—but now when there was no bridegroom-expectant to flutter that organ, it did seem singular certainly. Doubtless her mistress would speak presently, and afford the fullest

information ; in the meantime there was nothing for it but silence and sal volatile.

My Lady's eyes are closed, and her features pale and still as marble, but her lips are a little parted. With her white hands thus crosswise over her bosom, she looks, thinks the confidential maid—for all the world like that Dame Lisgard in the chancel, by the side of whose marble couch her twelve fair children kneel, and take their mother's ceaseless blessing. All twelve so near of an age, and so marvellously alike, thanks to the skill of the sculptor, that one would have thought the whole dozen—but that four, as Mistress Forest has read in *Portents and Prodigies*, is the extreme limit—had made their simultaneous arrival in the world. Stiff and cold almost as marble are my Lady's limbs, blue-veined like it and rounded ;

but by degrees, as Mary rubs them steadily, their life returns.

“Thank you, thank you,” murmurs her Ladyship. “I feel better now; but” (this with effort) “I wish to be left alone.”

“Alone, my Lady! I dare not leave you thus, without even knowing what ails you.”

“Nothing ails me now, Mary—nothing.” Lady Lisgard made a feint of smiling, but kept her eyelids shut. She did not dare to let her maid read what was written in her eyes.

“Was it your poor heart, again, madam?”

“Ay, my poor heart!” My Lady was speaking truth there. Among the thousand millions born to suffer on this earth, there was not one upon that Christmas Eve in mental agony more deep than hers. The blow

received had been so terrible and unexpected, that it had at first half stupified all feeling; the real torture was now commencing, when she was about to realise the full extent of her injuries. Lady Lisgard was not without courage; but she was no Indian warrior to desire a spectator of such torments. “I must be alone, dear Mary,” repeated she. “Be sure you breathe no word of this to any one. Say, however, that I am not very well. The cold when I opened that window to the Waits”—here she visibly shuddered—“seems to have frozen me to the marrow—you may tell them I have taken cold. I shall not be down to breakfast.”

“And I should recommend you to stayindoors, my dear (as I hope to persuade Miss Letty to do), although it *is* Christmas Day,” said Mary tenderly, as she made up

the fire before leaving the room; “for the church is far from warm.”

“I shall not go to church,” said Lady Lisgard, with a decision that reassured her attendant, and enabled her to wish her mistress “good-night” without much apprehension.

“He will be in the choir to-morrow morning,” was the thought which was crossing the minds of mistress and maid at the same instant.

CHAPTER IV.

SIR RICHARD GAINS HIS POINT.

I DON'T know how it was in the Monkish times in England, but it appears that the keeping of religious days—always excepting the Sabbath—is not in accordance with the genius of this country as it exists at present. By general habit, we are devout, or certainly reverent; and yet the majority seem unable to discriminate between a fast and a festival. Christmas Day, for example, is kept by the evangelical folks exactly like Sunday, which is with them very much the reverse of a feast-day. With the High Church

people, again, it is a Holiday, to be enjoyed after a certain peculiar fashion of their own ; while the great mass of the population outrage both these parties by treating half the day as a fast and the other half as a festival. After morning church, it is generally understood that one may enjoy one's self—that is, within the limit of the domestic circle. There is the rub. It is not every disposition which can appreciate forfeits and snap-dragon. My own respected grandfather used to thank Heaven with much devotion that he had always been a domestic man, who knew how to enjoy a peaceful Christmas in the bosom of his family ; but then he always went to sleep immediately after dinner, and nobody ventured to wake him until the servants came in to prayers, after which he went to bed.

It is a pleasant sight, says Holy Writ, to see brethren dwelling together in unity; but the remark would not have been put on record had the spectacle been a very common one. It is a sad confession to make, but I think most of us must own that the "family gathering" in the country, even at Christmastide, is not the most agreeable sort of social entertainment. There is too much predetermination to be jolly about such festivities, too much resolution to put up with Polly's temper and Jack's rudeness, and to please grandpapa (who is funded) at all hazards. When we find ourselves in the up-train again after that domestic holiday-week, we are not altogether displeased that it is over, and secretly congratulate ourselves that there has not been a row. I am, of course, speaking of ordinary folks, such as the world is mainly

composed of, and not of such exemplary people as my readers and myself. *We* have no family jealousies, no struggles for grandpapa's favour, no difficulties in having common patience with Polly, no private opinion—if he was not our brother—about Jack; no astonishment at Henry's success, no envy at Augusta's prospects. But with the majority of grown-up brothers and sisters, this is not so. Since they parted from one another under the paternal roof, their lines of life have diverged daily; their interests, so far from being identical, have become antagonistic. Margaret is as nice as ever; but Penelope is not a bit improved, and yet one must seem to be as glad to see one as the other. One must not only forgive, but forget; it is not (unhappily) necessary that we should be polite, but we must be affectionate; nay, we must not only be affec-

tionate—grandpapa will think it extremely odd if we are not “gushing.”

The Lisgard family circle was not large, though, as we have seen, there was room in it for disagreement; moreover, there was not a “dead set” of domestic element, the consanguinity being relieved by the presence of Miss Rose Aynton. If grandpapa were wise, this should always be the case; for it prevents Courtesy from taking leave of the company, which she is only too apt to do, under the mistaken notion that near relations can afford to do without her. It was with no such intention, however, that my Lady had asked Miss Aynton to visit Mirk. She would have thought it hard, indeed, if her two sons could not have spent a week together under the same roof without the presence of a stranger to prevent their quarrelling. Rose had been a

school-friend of Letty, and the latter young lady had asked permission to invite her young friend to the Abbey for Christmas. She had no home of her own to go to, poor thing, having neither father nor mother. She lived with her aunt, Miss Colyfield, a fashionable old lady in Mayfair, very popular among her acquaintance, but a sort of person, not uncommon in that locality, whom it is not altogether charming to reside with as a dependent. Miss Aynton was evidently accustomed to suppression. It made a man positively indignant to see one whose youth and intelligence entitled her to be the mistress of all who approached her, so humble, so unegotistic, so grateful. It was evident that she had plenty of natural good spirits, and every faculty for enjoyment, if she had only dared exhibit them. Her very accomplish-

ments, which were numerous, were timidly concealed, and peeped forth one by one, almost, as it seemed, by compulsion. She might have left Mirk, for instance, without a soul knowing of her taste for ecclesiastical decoration, if it had not been for a sore throat which prevented Letty from superintending the Christmas ornamentations in the chancel.

“Can’t *you* do it, my dear?” said Letty, a little peevish at the disappointment, and hopeless that her place could be satisfactorily filled by a London-bred girl like Rose, who had never seen holly-berries except in the greengrocers’ shops, or at the artificial florist’s. “Now, do try, and Richard and Walter will both help.”

“I will do my best, dear,” this young lady had answered simply. And never had anything so beautiful been seen in the county, as

was the result of her efforts. So much was said of them that Letty had ventured to go to church that morning, despite her ailment, and was as earnest in her praise as any in the congregation. There was no such thing as jealousy in her composition, and the success of her friend was a genuine pleasure to her.

“O mamma, you have missed such a sight!” cried she, as Lady Lisgard made her first appearance that morning at the luncheon-table, looking a little grave and pale, but gracious and dignified as a queen in exile, as usual. “Not only the chancel, but the whole church a perfect bower of evergreens, and everything so exquisitely done! The pillars, alternately ivy and laurel; and under the gallery, beautiful texts in holly-berries set in green. As for the wall at the back of the altar—the decorations there are such that it

makes one cry to think they are ever to be taken down again. Oh, I do hope you will feel well enough, dear mamma, to come to church this afternoon and see them."

"Really, Lady Lisgard," said Miss Aynton, blushing deeply, and with her soft eyes looking very much inclined to be tearful, "you must not believe all that Letty's kindness induces her to say about me."

"Nay, but it's true, mother," broke forth Sir Richard. "I never could have dreamt of anything so beautiful being made out of leaves and berries. The old church looks enchanted, and Miss Aynton is the fairy that has done it."

"Sir Richard suggested the centre design himself," returned Rose gravely; "and the fact is, I am nothing but a plagiarist in the whole affair. Our curate in Park Street gives him-

self up to floral religion, and dresses up his church in a dozen different garbs according to the season. I am one of its volunteer tiring-women, and am therefore accustomed to the business—that is all.”

“It is very honest of you to tell us that, Rose,” said my Lady approvingly.

“Yes, mamma,” broke in Letty; “but it was very wicked of her not to tell Mr Moseley, who came to thank her in the churchyard after service. He actually made an allusion to her in his sermon—talked about her ‘pious hands.’ She never told *him* one word about this London curate.”

Letty’s laugh rang merrily out as she thus twitted her friend, but her brothers did not echo it. Neither of them relished this mention of the Mayfair clergyman. They had each in turn enjoyed that religious work, in which

they had been fellow-labourers with Miss Aynton, and each perhaps flattered himself that she had been most pleased when his own fingers were looping the berries for her, or holding the ivy while she fastened it in its place. Of course there was nothing serious between either of them and herself. Sir Richard would naturally look higher for a bride than to the dependent niece of a fickle old woman of fashion; while as to Walter, with his comparatively small fortune and expensive tastes, it was absolutely necessary that he should "marry money," and not mere expectations. Still, no man is altogether pleased to hear that a young girl he admires is engaged to somebody else; and although this had not been said of Rose, yet Mayfair curates are dangerous persons, and church decoration (as they were aware by recent

experience) is a fascinating occupation when indulged in by both sexes at the same time.

So Letty had all the laughter to herself.

“How strange it was to hear the people when they first came in,” continued she. “Their ‘Ohs!’ and ‘Ahs!’ and ‘Well I nevers!’ were quite irrepressible.”

“Especially the gentleman in the gallery, who expressed his opinion that it was for all the world like May-day,” observed Walter slyly. “Miss Aynton’s *chef-d’œuvre* reminded him, it seems, of Jack-in-the-Green.”

“Yes, was it not shocking, mamma?” exclaimed Letty. “He spoke quite loud. I shouldn’t suppose that the creature had ever been in a church before. How he did stare about him!”

“You must have been looking in his

direction yourself, miss," returned the young dragoon, "as, indeed, were all the female part of the congregation. We don't see such awful beards as his in Mirk church every Sunday."

"How touchy dear Walter is upon the subject of beards," observed Letty demurely.

The captain's smooth face coloured like a girl's, while Miss Rose Aynton sought concealment in her pocket-handkerchief. Even Lady Lisgard forced herself to smile at the embarrassment of her handsome boy. But Sir Richard did not smile; he was not on sufficiently good terms with his younger brother to enjoy even so innocent a joke at his expense.

"You have not yet seen this distinguished stranger, I suppose, mamma?" resumed Letty, without whom—what with Rose's shyness and

the coldness between the two young men—the conversation would have languished altogether.

“What stranger do you mean, my dear?” said my Lady coldly.

“Why, the man that came with the Waits last night, and sang beneath your window. Surely you must have noticed his voice, so different from poor old Ash and the rest of them.”

“Now you mention it, Letty, I think I did remark that there was a strange singer among them. He had a voice like Mr Steve’s.”

“Very probably, my dear mother,” observed Walter laughing; “for they both use the same tuning-key—the Spigot. Steve is said to be quite jealous because this gentleman from foreign parts can take two glasses to his one, although it cannot be added that

he doesn't shew it. Steve can look like a Methodist parson when he pleases, whereas his new friend has made a sacrifice of his very countenance to Bacchus; and yet he must have been a handsome fellow at one time.—Don't you think so, Miss Aynton?"

"I really scarcely looked at him," returned the young lady addressed. "I should hesitate to pass an opinion upon this distinguished"

"O Rose," interrupted Letty archly; "how dare you!—Why, Walter, she told me herself, only five minutes ago, while we were taking off our bonnets, that she thought his expression 'magnificent'—that was her very word—and that she would like to take him in chalks."

"I must confess," said Rose, "without

venturing to call it good-looking or otherwise, that his countenance, artistically speaking, seems to me very striking. He is just one of those wicked people, I fancy, in whom one feels a sort of interest in spite of one's self.—Now, don't you think so, Sir Richard?"

"My dear Miss Aynton," returned the baronet with an air of hauteur that neutralised the familiarity implied by his words, "if this person has won your sympathy, he is fortunate indeed; but I must say that I don't see that he deserves it. His beard, which is certainly a handsome one, has also—as it seems to me—the great advantage of obscuring half his countenance. I confess, I think he looks to be a scoundrel of the first salt-water."

"That's what Rose *means!*!" cried Letty, clapping her hands. He's one of those dear

handsome villains who used to—ah, infest—yes, that's the phrase—who used to infest the Spanish Main. How charmingly mysterious was the very place in which they carried on their profession! If it was not for seasickness, I should like to have had something to do in the Spanish Main myself. I have not the shadow of a doubt that this Mr Derrick—evidently an assumed name—

“What's the matter, dearest mother?”

My Lady had uttered a low cry, such as is evoked by sudden and acute physical pain.

“Nothing, my love—nothing: it was a passing spasm, nothing more. A tinge of my old rheumatism again, I fear, which is a sign of old age, and therefore a malady I do not wish to be taken notice of.—Now, don't distress yourselves, my dears”—for all had

risen with looks of genuine and affectionate anxiety, except Miss Aynton, who had rapidly poured out a glass of wine.—“Thank you, Rose; that was all I wanted. Nobody offered me any sherry, so I thought I would try whether I could not obtain it medicinally.—What were you saying, Letty, about this—this person?”

“I was merely remarking that he had probably been a buccaneer, mamma.”

“In other words, that he deserves hanging,” observed Sir Richard gruffly. “I hope he will soon take himself out of the parish, for we have got tipplers enough in it already.”

“Dear, dear, dear!” said Letty sedately; “to make such an observation as that, just after mamma has been craving for sherry! Besides, how can this gentleman annoy *you*,

Sir Richard? He isn't come here to dispute the title, is he?"

My Lady kept her lips closed this time; but an anguish passed over her face that would have been easy to see, had not the eyes of those at table been otherwise engaged.

Letty was looking at her friend, in hopes that she should get her to laugh at her high and mighty brother; Rose did not dare look up, for fear she should do so. Walter, his handsome lips slightly curled, was contemptuously watching the baronet, who stared, Sphinx-like, right before him, as was his custom whenever he was in one of his autocratic humours, as at present.

"I don't choose to have persons of that sort in the parish," said he with icy distinctness.

“But, my dear Richard, you can’t turn him out,” reasoned Letty, rather vexed by an exhibition of her brother’s pride before her school-friend beyond what she had calculated upon. “He has a right to stop at the *Lisgard Arms* as long as he pleases.”

“And *I* have a right to turn Steve out as a tenant”—

“You have nothing of the kind, Richard,” interposed Walter quietly; “you have no more right than I—not even legal right, for the inn is not yet yours, and as for moral right, it would be the most monstrous piece of territorial oppression ever heard of out of Poland. So long as the man behaves himself”—

“He does *not* behave himself,” put in Sir Richard angrily. “He is a drunkard, and a brawler in church.”

“Gracious mercy! how you must have been looking up Burn’s *Justice*. But you will not be a magistrate, a *custos rotulorum*, till you are of age, remember, so that he is safe for six months. In the meantime, he certainly means to stay here. He is so good as to say he likes Mirk, I understand; and the village folks like *him*. He is a great addition to the choir; and I shall certainly ask him, in case he remains, to join our Mirk volunteers: Steve tells me he is a most admirable shot with a rifle, and will do the corps credit.”

“That is all the worse,” quoth Sir Richard violently; “he is only the more likely to be a poacher. We have more than enough of that sort already, and I beg that you will give none such your encouragement.”

“Encouragement!” returned Walter airily. “What patronage have *I* to offer? I am not Sir Richard, who can make a man happy with a word.”

“Very well,” continued the baronet with suppressed passion, “let him take care how he trespasses upon the Abbey-lands—that’s all.”

“Nay, you’ll see him at the Abbey itself,” laughed Walter carelessly, “and that pretty often, unless I quite misinterpreted Mistress Forest’s manner when she parted from him at the Lych Gate: I never saw two people more affectionate upon so short an acquaintance.”

“A most ineligible suitor, I am sure,” broke forth the baronet. “I trust Mary is not fool enough to disgrace herself at her time of life by any such alliance.”

“She is almost old enough to choose for herself,” responded Walter drily. “The selection of a husband for one’s servant is scarcely the privilege of even a lord of the manor, and when the servant is not one’s own”—

“I believe, sir,” interrupted Sir Richard hastily, “that I am only speaking the sentiments of her mistress, in whose hands, of course, the matter lies.—Mother, do you not agree with me that it would be very unwise to encourage any attachment between Mary Forest and this reprobate stranger, Derrick?”

It was plain my Lady had not recovered from her late ailment, of whatever nature the attack might have been; otherwise, she would have interfered between the brothers before a direct appeal for her decision had

been made by either of them, it being a rule with her never to place herself in an invidious position with respect to her children. To the astonishment of the baronet himself, however, Lady Lisgard now forced her pale lips to utter deliberately enough: "I think it would be very unwise."

"And therefore," pursued Sir Richard, hastening to push his advantage, "it would be worse than unwise, it would be absolute cruelty, since you do not intend her to marry this fellow, that opportunities should be afforded her of meeting him under the same roof. I do not say that his offence of brawling in church this morning is a sufficient ground of itself for forbidding him the house, although to most persons with any sense of decency it would be a serious misdemeanour: but would it not be

well, under these particular circumstances, to treat it so?"

"Yes," returned my Lady, rising from the table, white as a ghost, "you are right, Richard; let this Mr Derrick be forbidden the house."

CHAPTER V.

M A S T E R W A L T E R.

THE day after Christmas Day was friendly to the fox ; in other words, a hard frost ; and since Miss Rose Aynton and Letty had declined to play at billiards with Walter until the afternoon—for it is vicious (in the country) to indulge in that pastime in the morning, as it is to play at cards before candle-light—that young gentleman, being no reader, felt the time rather heavy on his hands, and strolled into the village to get rid of it. The snow had ceased to fall, but

not before, like a good housekeeper when the family has left town, it had covered up everything very carefully, except the tops of the chimneys, through which the tidings of good-cheer rolled forth in dusky columns from every cottage; for there were no abject poor in Mirk, thanks to my Lady, or any that lacked victuals at that joyous season. The Lisgards had ever been a free-handed race, as generous out of doors as hospitable within; and their influence for good had been felt for generations throughout the village. I do not say that they expected no repayment; their rule was paternal, and they looked for something like filial obedience in return. If a villager had passed any member of that august family without pulling his hair, as though it were a bell-handle, in token of respect, it would have been

considered a sign of revolution, and they would have congratulated themselves that the yeomanry were in a state of efficiency. The feudal system was still in vogue at Mirk, but tempered not only by excellent beef-tea in sickness, and port wine from the Abbey cellar during convalescence, but by the best Gothic architecture, as applied to cottages. If eleven human beings did sometimes sleep in a single room, and the domestic arrangements were inferior to those which Mr Chifney of the Farm provided for his race-horses, the tenement looked outside very picturesque, as seen from the Abbey windows. Nay, it must be owned that even this inconvenience of overcrowding was rare in the home-village, in comparison with other places on the Lisgard estate, not so near the family seat, about which everything was in

externals, at least, becomingly spick and span.

Dr Haldane, indeed, who had property of his own, and could afford to entertain political opinions at variance with those in favour at the Abbey, had been of old accustomed irreverently to adapt a certain popular nursery ballad to the state of things at Mirk.

Who built the infant school so red?

Who set that striking-clock o'erhead,

To tell us all the time for bed?

The Lisgards.

Who made, and at such great expense,

Around our pond that iron fence,

To keep the pigs and boys from thence?

The Lisgards, &c.

In short, Mirk was a pet hamlet, and exhibited a hundred tokens of its patron's favour. It was surely only right and proper,

therefore, that all the votes in the village at election-time, except the doctor's, went the same way with the squire's, and that even in social matters he exercised unquestioned sway. Mirk was as respectable as the brotherhood of Quakers, and was rendered so by the same simple machinery; any one in the place who shewed a disposition to be otherwise was immediately turned out. Did a man drink, so as to cause public disturbance, or pick up sticks (to save himself trouble) out of the park-fences—or, worse than all, did he Poach—were it but a pheasant's egg—he received the most peremptory notice to quit the model village. The issuing of these ukases of banishment had been, now and then, a severe trial to the popularity of the Lisgards; but it had overlived all such acts —nay, more, even its favouritism, that

seemingly indispensable element of the feudal system, had been forgiven it. Nobody now complained that George Steve, who notoriously never went to bed quite sober, still continued tenant of the *Lisgard Arms*; while Jacob Flail and Joseph Dibble had been condemned, with their families, to banishment for life for a less habitual commission of the same offence.

Much less did it strike the villagers that it was inconsistent in a landlord, so careful for the morality of his people, to let so large a portion of the Abbey Farm to a trainer of race-horses, of which there were at present upwards of thirty in Mirk; and in summer, when the Downland above was fit for their exercise, there were often twice as many. But then Mr Chifney was not like an ordinary trainer; nor did his jockey-boys, thanks to his strict

supervision, behave like ordinary jockey-boys. They attended divine service on alternate Sundays, and half-a-dozen of them were in the choir. Mr Moseley (who was Anglican) had even taken into consideration the advisability of putting these last into surplices, but Mr Chifney had dissuaded him from that experiment. They had always been accustomed to the most tight-fitting of garments, strait-waist-coats, buck-skin breeches, and gaiters—and perhaps he thought the transition would be too abrupt. Their habits, in some other respects, were loose, and yet they were suffered to breathe the Lisgard air. Mr Chifney's boys were like the servants of ambassadors at foreign courts, who enjoy a separate jurisdiction from that to which the native inhabitants submit. The law itself—at least in the case of petty offences—was not called in to punish these

young gentlemen; but I believe they were "colted"—for the whole discipline was "horsey"—by Mr Chifney's head-groom. I do not know the exact manner in which this chastisement was inflicted; but it must have differed from the ordinary method, since they never failed to pursue their daily equestrian duties as usual. Mr Chifney looked after that himself, and exceedingly sharp. Nothing went amiss through oversight in his establishment, and his employers had every reason to put confidence in him. He left no means untried to insure the success of the costly animals it was his mission to groom and guard. His very acceptance of the post of churchwarden had been described by his enemies as an attempt to "hedge"—to make friends with those powers of good which are generally supposed to be antagonistic, if they have anything to do

with it at all, to the profession of horse-racing. It is certain that Mr Chifney, whose occupations seldom permitted his own attendance at public worship, never failed to come to church upon those Sundays which immediately preceded the Derby and the St Leger, and indeed it is very likely that he treated them (without knowing it) as the eves of his patron saints' days.

It was to the Abbey Farm that Mr Walter Lisgard was now bound ; for to the young gentlemen of England, what is a more interesting spectacle than a racing-stable—what is a more charming subject of conversation than the next Great Event ? And who more fitted to afford every information upon that important topic—if he chose—than Mr Tite Chifney ? *If he chose.* Therein lay the whole matter ; for Mr Chifney was reticent, as became one

intrusted with a hundred thousand pounds' worth of horseflesh, upon whose performances depended perhaps, in the aggregate, millions of money. He had put "Master Walter" up to a "good thing," however, more than once, and the captain had no doubt but that he would do it again. He never did doubt of his own success either with man or woman. Confidence, but without swagger, self-content, but without vanity, were evident enough in those handsome features, illuminated almost at all times with the desire to please. He lit his cigar at the hall-door, smoothed away a fallen spark from his sealskin waistcoat, and took his way down the leafless avenue, humming the latest lively air, as he crunched the snow beneath his dainty boots. How different from Sir Richard's measured step and haughty silence, thought the gatekeeper's wife, as she

hastened out of the lodge, from the side-window of which she had marked her favourite approach. “Never mind me, Martha,” cried he laughing; “I’m tall enough now to lift the latch for myself. My boots are thicker than yours are—look—and I have no rheumatism, which, I am afraid, you have not quite got rid of yet. There—I won’t speak a word with you till you go inside. How’s the guidman? Ah, out, is he? How’s little Polly? Hullo, Polly, how you’re grown! Why, I daresay she won’t kiss me now, as she always used to do.”

“Oh yes, she’ll kiss you, Master Walter,” answered the old dame; “there’s no harm in kissing o’ *you*; although I wouldn’t say that to my daughter of ne’er another young man in the county.—Come, lass, you need not blush so, for I’ve had many a one from the same

young gentleman." And the old dame laughed and chuckled, until that dread enemy of honest-hearted mirth, the lumbago, twitched her into her chair.

Polly, a very pretty country lassie, about sixteen, stood pink and hesitating while the captain removed his cigar, and waited — smiling demigod — for the promised favour.

"Come, gi'e it to him, and ha' done wi' it," cried the old lady, exasperated by her torments. Thereupon the girl stepped forward, head aside. Master Walter met her, touched her soft cheek with his lip, and as his silken moustache brushed her ear, whispered an airy something which turned her crimson. There was nothing in the words themselves save the merest compliment; their magic lay in the tone of him who used them; so tender, yet so frank, so

familiar, and yet so gracious. Then, with a smile, he bade them both "good-bye," and strolling through the gate, resumed his interrupted ditty, as though kissing were the most innocent as well as the most natural of all pastimes; but Polly pressed her throbbing brow against the pane for its very coolness, and watched him saunter down the village street with quite a flutter at her heart, and promised to herself that she would not forget the captain's kiss—no, not though Joe, the under-gardener, should speak his mind next "feast" (as it was rumoured in well-informed circles that he intended to do), and "keep her company" in earnest.

That she was doing no wrong in this was certain, for not only her mother, but everybody else in Mirk, agreed that there

was no sort of harm in Master Walter, let him do what he might. He had a way of doing things so very different from others. How the very dogs fawned upon him as he sauntered on, and the old horse in the straw-yard stretched its gray head over the gate in hopes of a caress as he went by! How the boys by the roadside left their Snow-man an unfinished torso, and ran to make their bows before the good-natured captain, with an eye to *largesse*, in the form of a copper scramble; and how the school-girls courtesied, with admiring awe, as they pictured to themselves how fine a figure handsome Master Walter must needs cut in gold and scarlet! He had a nod or a word for almost everybody, young or old; but if his look but lit upon another's face, it left a pleasure there, as the Sun leaves when it has shone upon

one. Delayed by these reciprocal manifestations of good-will, like a young prince making a Royal Progress among a well-affected people, Walter Lisgard at length got free of the village, and climbing a steep hill (never used by the race-horses even in much less slippery weather), arrived at his destination, the Abbey Farm. This was a long, low, ancient building, belonging to one could scarce tell what date, so pieced, and restored, and added to, had been the original structure; but when the Abbey was an Abbey, the Abbey Farm had been a sort of branch-establishment, in the occupation of the monks; there were traces of their sojourn even now: over the pointed porch yet stood a cross of stone, though broken; and in the garden, now all white and hoar, that lay between the house and road, there was a mighty sun-

dial, carved like a font with noseless saints in niches, and round the rim a scripture, of which alone the words *nox venit* could be deciphered. The night *had* come, not only upon those who built and blessed such things, but on the faith which they professed. The very memory of themselves and it had faded from men's minds. Not one in ten at Mirk —where all had owned the Abbot for liege-lord, and bowed their heads before his meanest monk, in token of their soul's humility, but a few centuries back—not one in ten, I say, could tell even what that niche on the south side of the communion-table meant, which the learned called *Piscina*. The mighty bower that had once been the granary of the Abbey, and to which the poor had looked with thankful eyes in times of scarcity, still stood beside the homestead, but the remem-

brance of its very use was gone ; the only legend clinging to its moss-grown walls was that a Long Parliament had once held its sittings there. Save the farmhouse and the barn, all relics of the past had been swept away. Immediately behind them was quite a town of stables and loose boxes, all of the most modern construction, and furnished with the latest inventions for equine comfort. The enormous farmyard, strewn with a thick carpet of clean straw, was now the exercising-ground for the horses ; but in the summer, a gate at the back of the premises opened immediately upon the grassy upland, the proximity of which had tempted Mr Tite Chifney to pitch his tent and enlarge his boundaries at the Abbey Farm. So high had been the rent he offered for this eligible situation, that the late Sir Robert had

removed his own agricultural head-quarters elsewhere, and suffered Mr Chifney and his race-horses to occupy the whole place, which was now the capital of the Houwhyhims—the largest establishment in Great Britain, wherein man held the secondary position, and the Horse the principal.

CHAPTER VI.

THE RACING-STABLE.

IT was Mr Chifney in person who admitted Walter Lisgard, after a precautionary glance at him through a little grating, which doubtless the monks had used for a similar purpose, although without the same excuse, for they had never possessed any Derby “cracks” to be poisoned. Mr Chifney might have been himself a monk but for his apparel, which, although scrupulously neat and plain, fitted him almost like war-paint, so that there was not a crease to be seen, except at

the knees, of which he made as much use as the holy fathers themselves did, though not precisely in the same way. His dark hair was closely cropped, and a little bald spot on the top of the crown might well have been taken for a tonsure. Moreover, he had a grave and secretive look, which would have well enough become one in whom were reposed the secrets of the Confessional ; and when he smiled, he looked sorry for it immediately afterwards, as though he had given way to a carnal pleasure.

Captain Lisgard shook the trainer's hand with his usual hearty warmth, and Mr Chifney returned his pressure with unwonted cordiality. He was accustomed to meet men of a much higher social rank than his present visitor on something like equal terms ; many

of them shook hands with him ; all of them treated him with familiarity. The Turf, like the Grave, levels all distinctions. Between the Lord and the Blackleg (to make an antithetical use of terms that are not seldom synonymous), there is but slight partition on that common ground ; the widest gulf of social difference is bridged over, *pro tem.*, by the prospect of an advantageous bet. How much more, then, was this wont to be the case in view of the trustworthy “information” which Mr Tite Chifney had it so often in his power to bestow ? Marquises had taken his arm in a confidential manner before now in the most public places, and dukes had called him “Tite ;” even ladies of the highest fashion had treated him to pretty speeches, and to what they hoped might turn out literally “winning ways.” But the

great trainer estimated all these condescensions at their true value. He never concealed from himself the motives that caused these people to be so civil to him ; and perhaps he had seen too much of the turfite aristocracy to be flattered by their attentions, even had they been disinterested. But Walter Lisgard's greeting was different from those which he was wont to receive from his great patrons ; there was not only a cordial frankness about it, but a something of sympathy, conveyed with marvellous tact, in his air and manner ; which seemed to say : "I unfeignedly regret that anything like friendship should be impossible between us, for I am your social superior ; and yet, how ridiculous a thing it is that this should be so ! I, but the younger brother of a man himself of no great position, and you, at

the head of that profession in which the noblest in the land take so great and personal an interest." If Mr Chifney did not read all this, it is certain that so acute an observer could not fail to read some of it. He was as far from being moved by any considerations not strictly practical as any man connected with horseflesh ; his calling, too, rendered him as suspicious of his fellow-creatures as a police detective ; but Master Walter's sort of flattery was too subtle for him. He had always had a liking for this genial young fellow, with his handsome face and pleasant speech, and who, moreover, rode across country like a centaur ; he was one of his own landlord's family, too, and the heir-presumptive of the property, whose favour it was just as well to win and keep ; and lastly, the lad

had been so unfeignedly grateful to him for the little hints he had occasionally afforded him, as well as so wisely reticent about his informant, that he was not unwilling to help him again to a few "fivers," if he could do so without the betrayal of professional confidence.

"Come for another 'tip,' eh, Master Walter?" whispered he good-naturedly as he led the way into the house. "You see I did not deceive you the last time you were here about *Cambyses*!"

"No, indeed, you did not, Mr Chifney" (Walter never addressed this friend of his without the *Mister*), "and a very great blessing it was to yours thankfully at a time when he was even more hard-up than usual. Is your Derby 'crack' visible to-day? I am poor, but honest. I have no

motive beyond that of curiosity, and if suspected of a concealed weapon, will submit to be searched."

"Well, Master Walter," grinned the trainer, "I can't say that I much credit the honesty of anybody myself; but I don't see why you should not have a look at his majesty, particularly as there is one coming here this morning already upon the same errand, and I'm sure I'd as soon oblige you as him—or, indeed, as any man, let it be who it will."

"You are very kind to say so, Mr Chifney, and still more to mean it, as I am sure you do; but I feel that I have no right with my bagatelle of a stake depending upon the matter to take up your time—nay, I must insist upon throwing my cigar away before entering your house; it is all very well for

Mrs Chifney to give *you* the privilege of smoking within doors, but I could not venture to take such a liberty myself. What a jolly place this is of yours; I always think it is so much snugger than the Abbey. I should never sit anywhere but in your grand old kitchen, if I were you."

"Well, the fact is we *do* sit a good deal in the kitchen," returned Mr Chifney reddening. "It's warm, you see, although it's large, and my wife likes to see how things are going on. She's engaged there just at present, and—you're a great favourite of hers; but I would recommend you to step in as you *go out*, instead of now. A queer thing is woman, Master Walter, and no man can tell how queer till he comes to be married! Young gals is all sweetness and easily cajoled; but

wives—O lor! Now, it's exactly different with horseflesh, for the brood-mares one *can* manage with a little care, and it's only the fillies that give us trouble, and have such tempers of their own. There; that's a Derby nag, *Blue Ruin*, in the cloths yonder, and I believe the Duke would not sell him for three thousand pounds; but I have told His Grace, as I tell you, that I wouldn't back the horse even for a place."

"A splendid stepper, too," exclaimed Walter admiringly, as the beautiful creature paced slowly round the straw-yard, with arching neck and distended nostrils, as though he were aware of the trainer's depreciating remarks, and could afford to despise them.

"That's true," rejoined Mr Chifney drily; "but we don't want steppers, but goers; there's a vast of steppers in this world, both

men and horses.—Now, in that box yonder, there is an animal who, in my opinion, could give *Blue Ruin* ten pounds; but you shall judge for yourself presently. *The King's* palace is this next one."

And truly, scarce could horse be better housed than was his equine majesty. No light-house could be more exquisitely clean; no drawing-room in Mayfair more neat, or better suited to the requirements of its inhabitant, although of ornament, save the plaited straw that fringed the royal couch, there was nothing. A dim religious light pervaded this sanctuary, which was kept at a moderate temperature by artificial means, while an admirable ventilation prevented the slightest "smell of the stable" from being perceptible. The object of all this consideration was a magnificent bay horse, by rule of *Liliput*, very

fitly named *The King*, since, if not a head taller than his fellows, he was fully “a hand.” His coat quite shone amid the gloom, and as the key turned in the door, he pricked his long fine ears, and turned his full eyes upon his two visitors inquiringly, with far more expression in his lean-jawed face than is possessed by many a human creature.

“This gives the world assurance of a horse indeed,” muttered Walter to himself as he contemplated this wonder. “Shew me his faults, Mr Chifney, for his excellences dazzle me.”

“Well, sir,” whispered the trainer, looking up towards a square hole in the ceiling, “it is not for me to depreciate ‘the crack;’ and there’s a boy up yonder—for the horse is never left for a moment, night or day—who is getting too sharp to live, at least in my stables. But look at what he stands on.”

Most men who ride think it a disgrace not to know all about a horse. Every man who keeps a pony thinks himself qualified to "pick" out the winner from any number of thoroughbreds before "the start;" and when the race is over, protests that he *had* picked him out in his own mind, only something (not quite satisfactorily explained) made him distrust his own judgment, and back a loser.

It was a great temptation to Captain Walter Lisgard, of the 104th Light Dragoons, to shew himself horse-wise, but he put it from him manfully, or rather, with strength of mind far beyond that of most men of his class. "The pasterns seem to be long and strong enough," answered he, "and the feet neither too large nor too small."

"Just what my lord says," observed the trainer in the same low tones; "nor can I

make him see that there is any degree of contraction. But he is not *your* horse, so tell me ; look now—is it not so ?”

It was so, or at least it seemed to be so to the captain, as the trainer returned the faulty member to its proprietor, with the air of a banker declining a forged cheque.

“ It is of small consequence to me,” said Walter ; “ but I shall be sorry if the winner does not come out of your stable. I took a thousand to twenty in October, which I can now hedge to great advantage.”

“ If you take my advice, you will hold on,” said Mr Chifney confidentially. “ Twenty pound is little to lose, and what I have shewn you by no means destroys his chance ; moreover, *The King* will not be deposed in the betting. I shall be surprised if, in the paddock, they lay more than three to one.”

“ You were going to tell me something, Mr Chifney, only you thought better of it,” said Captain Lisgard, laying his finger upon the other’s coat-cuff, as they emerged from the royal presence. “ And yet you trusted me when I was but a boy at school, and I never abused your confidence.”

“ What a fellow you are to read a chap ! ” returned the trainer admiringly. “ Burst my buttons, but you are a cunning one, Master Walter ! It is true that I was thinking of letting you into a little secret—though, after all, it mayn’t be worth much. Let us come on to the tan-gallop for five minutes, for nowhere else can we get out of earshot of these boys.” With that, passing through a paddock, itself provided with a straw-ride, so that the race-horses need not set foot upon the frost-bound turf as they issued forth to

exercise, Mr Chifney led the way to the upland, where a broad brown road of tan was permanently laid on the level down. Here the trainer paused, and speaking aloud for the first time, observed in a solemn tone: “Now, look you, true as fate, I would tell no other man but you. What I said about *The King’s* feet was on the square: but that ain’t all. There’s a horse here as nobody ever heard of, and yet who’s a real good un. He’s the one that I said could give *Blue Ruin* ten pounds. You may get two hundred to one against him at this blessed moment, and he ’ll be at twenty to one before April Fool Day. It’s the best thing we’ve had at Mirk yet, and—— Ah, the devil! here comes the man I was expecting; remember, we were talking about *The King.*”

“Morning, Mr Chifney,” said the new-comer,

nodding familiarly to the trainer.—“And morning to *you*, sir, if you ain’t too proud to accept it.”

He was a large-built middle-aged man, with a sunburnt countenance, generally good-humoured enough, notwithstanding the presence of a truculent red beard, but upon this occasion, somewhat sullen, and even defiant. Walter recognised in him the stranger stopping at the *Lisgard Arms*, at once, and was at no loss to account for his displeasure. He had doubtless received some hint that his presence at the Abbey would not be welcome.

“Good-morning, Mr Derrick,” returned the captain cheerfully. “There is no pride about me, since, unfortunately, I have nothing to be proud of; but if there was, why should I not return a civil reply to a civil speech?”

“Oh, because I ain’t good enough to speak

to," answered the other scornfully. "Because I ain't a gentleman, forsooth, like your high and mighty family. But the fact is, sir, although I have got decent blood in my veins myself, I come from a country where we don't care *that*"—and he snapped his fingers with a noise equal to the crack of a whip—"for who is a man's father, unless the man himself is worth his salt."

"That, then, must have been the reason why this good-for-nothing ruffian left that country," thought the captain; but he answered with humility: "Then, I fear, I should be giving up my best chance if I went there."

"Well," answered the stranger, somewhat mollified, "you don't speak like one of them beastly aristocrats—that I will say—as though it were too much trouble to open their darned lips."

Mr Derrick himself did not speak like an aristocrat either; his voice, though rich in song, had in speech a strong northern burr, which rescued it from any such imputations. “Why, if a man in my country,” continued he, “should venture to warn another off his land —unless, of course, it was a mining claim— as Sir Richard Lisgard”—

“Mr Derrick,” interrupted the captain firmly, “I am sure that it is not the custom in any country in the world to abuse a man’s brother to his face. Having said that much, I will add that, if you have received any rudeness from any one at the Abbey, I am sincerely sorry for it. It did not emanate from *me*. Mr Chifney here will give me a character so far.”

“Master Walter is as civil-spoken and well-behaved a young gentleman as any in the county,” exclaimed the trainer warmly; “and

I will go bail has never given you or any man offence. He has just stepped in, like you, to see ‘the crack,’ on which he has a little money; and since I am not one of those who say: ‘It is no use now a days to attempt to take in your enemies, and therefore your friends must suffer,’ I have been giving him some advice.”

“About *Manylaws?*” inquired the stranger suspiciously, turning sharp round upon the captain.

The look of blank astonishment upon that gallant officer’s face would have set at rest the doubts of a Pollaky.

“It is not my habit to disclose my customer’s secrets,” observed the trainer tartly; “although I may say that, with Master Walter, everything is as safe as wax.”

“Is it so?” quoth Mr Derrick warmly;

“then let him come with us and see the Black.—Only mind, Mr Walter Lisgard, I will not have that brother of yours bettered by a fourpenny-piece by anything you may see or hear to-day.”

“My brother never bets upon any race,” answered the captain quietly ; “so that promise is easily given.”

“Then come along with me and Mr Chifney,” said the stranger, holding out his hairy hand in token of amity. “You’ve read a deal about that crack as I’ve just been looking at ; but I dare say, now, you have never so much as heard of this same *Manylaws*.”

“Not unless you mean the French horse, about which there were a few lines in *Bell* some time ago—*Menelaus*.”

“Ay, that’s him. But it’s called *Manylaws*,” explained Mr Derrick ; “for you wouldn’t think

of calling the Oaks' mare *Antigown*, I suppose, *Antigone*. Well, the Black ain't fancied much, I reckon ; but he *will* be, Mr Chifney, eh ? He *will* be ? ”

“ It is my opinion that he will be at very short odds indeed,” returned the trainer ; “ and many more people will be desirous of paying him a call than do him that honour just at present. This is his stable. He does not look quite such a likely horse as *The King*, Master Walter, does he ? There's bone for you ! ”

“ An ounce of blood is worth a pound of bone, says the proverb,” remarked the captain.

“ So far as that goes, although he *is* a Frenchman,” answered the trainer, “ he has Godolphin's blood in his veins. But only look at his ragged hips ! ”

“ Ragged enough, Mr Chifney. And do

you mean to say that this animal will be a public favourite?"

"We hope not," returned the trainer, winking facetiously at his bearded friend; "but—— Shall we tell him what we *do* hope, Mr Derrick?"

"I'll tell him myself," quoth the other impulsively, "for you say the young gentleman is safe, and I have taken a sort of unaccountable fancy to him. We hope, and more than that, believe, Captain Lisgard, that that same ragged-hipped horse will Win the Derby!"

"Two hundred to one against Mr Blanquette's *Menelaus*," murmured Walter pathetically, as though it were a line from some poem of the affections.

"That's the present quotation," answered Mr Derrick with a chuckle, and rattling a

quantity of loose silver and gold in his breeches' pockets. "Perhaps you would like to lay it in ponies with Mr Chifney and me."

"No, Mr Derrick; but I should like to thank you very much for letting me into this secret, which, I assure you, shall never pass my lips;" and he held out his hand to the stranger.

"Our way lies together as far as the inn," returned the other warmly; "we'll liquor—— But there; I forgot I was no longer in Cariboo. I dare say a gentleman like you *don't* liquor so early in the day."

"At all events, I will walk with you, my good sir," answered the captain laughing; and so, forgetting to repeat his request to be permitted to pay his respects to the trainer's

wife, he took his departure with his new acquaintance.

“And who *is* this Monsieur Blanquette?” inquired Walter carelessly as they walked down the village street.

“He was a mate of mine at the gold-diggings in British Columbia, and the only Frenchman as ever I saw there. We did a pretty good stroke of work together; and when we came home, he invested his money in horseflesh, and that there *Manylaws* was one of his cheapest bargains.”

“I think I saw it stated somewhere that Mr Blanquette is only part-owner of the horse?” observed the captain inquiringly.

“That’s *so*,” rejoined the other. “It belongs to him and a company.”

“And you are the company, eh, Mr Derrick?”

“You have hit it,” responded the bearded man with the air of a proprietor. “This here child is the *Co.* in question.”

CHAPTER VII.

A BROKEN FRIENDSHIP.

WEEKS and months have passed by at Mirk Abbey; the snow has thawed, and the cold winds of March have done their worst, and the spring is clothing nature's nakedness with garments of green. Yet all this time, my Lady, who is so fond of outdoor exercise, even in rough weather, and such a constant visitor of the poor, has never been seen beyond the Park gates. To be sure, she has had more to keep her within than usual, for the captain not only

got his leave prolonged at the beginning of the year, but came home for three weeks very shortly after, and is at Mirk again at the present time. Miss Rose Aynton, too, a very nice young lady, and most attentive to her hostess, seems to have become quite a resident at the Abbey, for, with the exception of a week's absence in London, she has remained there since Christmas, her departure having indeed been vaguely fixed more than once, but only to be as indefinitely postponed. It is now understood that she will certainly stay over the festivities attendant upon Sir Richard's coming of age in June. The baronet himself, who, his detractors say, always prefers the country, where he is somebody, to town, where baronets are plentiful, has scarcely been away at all. He writes to inquiring friends

in London, most of whom happen to have marriageable daughters, that he is immersed in business connected with the estate, and cannot leave Mirk at present. Mr Rinkel, the agent, however, has seen no cause to relax his ordinary exertions, in consequence of this new-born application of the young gentleman to his own affairs ; and Walter wickedly asserts that his brother is in reality occupied with no other business whatever, save that of keeping the man Derrick from trespassing upon the Abbey lands. He is very glad, he says, that Richard has at last found an object in life, and hopes that, like the French sportsman's woodcock, it will last him for a good long time.

It does not help to heal the breach between the brothers that Walter and this same man have grown very intimate, a fact

which Sir Richard (assuming to himself a metaphor usually applied only to Providence) stigmatises as “flying in his face.”—His mother, however, declines to take this view of it—declines even to express an opinion about it one way or another, and avoids the subject as much as she can. Even with the confidential maid, notwithstanding her decision about Mr Derrick’s ineligibility as a suitor, she forbears to reason with respect to this matter, although it is understood that the forbidden swain is gaining ground in the affections of Mistress Forest. There is but one person to whom my Lady has opened her lips concerning the man she dimly saw by lantern-light on Christmas Eve, and has never seen since. Her confidant—if one can be called so to whom so little was confided—is Mr Arthur Haldane,

the only son of the doctor, and one who has been a great favourite with Lady Lisgard from his youth up, not for his own sake merely, although he is honest and kind, and very winning with those who look beyond externals (for he is not good-looking, or, at least, does not appear so by contrast with her own handsome sons), but for another reason: my Lady owed him a reparation of love for a wrong that she had inadvertently done his father.

Dr Haldane and the late Sir Robert had been at school together, and their boy-friendship had lasted, as it seldom does, through their university course. Their mutual esteem had not afterwards suffered by propinquity, when they came to pass their days within a few hundred yards of one another; and when my Lady married, she

found that the dearest friend her husband had on earth was Dr Haldane. She was not the woman to come between her husband's friends and himself; and the doctor (who had had his doubts about the matter before he came to know her) was wont to declare the Abbey was even more of a second home to him than it used to be, now that his old friend had placed so charming a mistress at the head of it. He was always welcome there, and being himself a widower, was glad to take advantage of Sir Robert's hospitality whenever he could; a knife and fork were laid for him at table all the year round; and when he did not appear at the dinner-hour, either husband or wife was sure to observe: "I am afraid we shall not see the doctor with us to-day." It would have seemed as

though nothing short of death could have interrupted such cordiality as this.

But in those days there was such a thing as Politics. The baronet was a Tory, and his friend a Whig of what was afterwards called “advanced opinions.” They bickered over their wine three nights out of every seven, though they never failed to drink each other’s healths before they sought the company of the hostess. These political discussions (unfortunately, as it turned out) were scrupulously confined to the dining-room, so that my Lady had no idea of the strength of the respective prejudices of the combatants, and of the severity of the trial to which their friendship was so often subjected. Brought up as she had been among persons in humble life, who were engaged in bread-winning (a very mono-

polising occupation), and educated in France, where the question of English reform was never mooted, she knew little or nothing of the matters which formed the subjects of dispute, although they were setting half England together by the ears. It seems strange to read of now, but the idol which Toryism had set up to worship at that epoch was a heartless and vulgar fop, whom it sycophantically dubbed the First Gentleman in Europe; while the Whigs pinned their faith upon the virtue of his wife, a woman as vulgar as himself, and whom her enemies endeavoured to shew was almost as vicious. Over this good-for-nothing pair, Lords, Commons, and People were quarrelling together, like a mob at a dog-fight, and the public press was solely occupied with hounding them on. To dip into a news-

paper of that date is to make an excursion to Billingsgate, for both parties, equally unable to whitewash their candidate, confined themselves to vilifying their opponent.

When the report upon the bill of Pains and Penalties against Queen Caroline was finally approved by a majority of nine only, and those nine representing the votes of the ministers themselves, the popular excitement culminated. The Whigs decreed that there should be illuminations throughout the kingdom, and (what seems hard) that their adversaries should express the same satisfaction in a similar manner. For three consecutive nights, the Londoners made plain the innocence of their queen, so far as pyrotechnics and oil-lamps could do it; and for one night, the country was expected to do the like. Vast mobs paraded the streets of the

provincial towns, to see that this was done, and even made excursions to the country-houses of the Disaffected. Among others, Mirk Abbey was threatened with a visitation of this sort; and I must confess that the doctor rather chuckled over the notion, that the stubborn Sir Robert, who had called his sovereign lady so many opprobrious epithets, would have to dedicate his candles to her, as though she were his patron saint. The baronet, on his part, protested that every window in his house should be broken rather than exhibit so much as a farthing-dip; but he said nothing to his wife about the matter, lest it should make her nervous.

They happened to be engaged to pass that November week at a friend's house in the country, and left home accordingly.

The gentleman with whom they stayed himself suffered some inconvenience from the rioters on the night in question; and when Sir Robert came back, he was even less inclined to be a convert to his Whig friend's opinions than before.

“But you *did* illuminate,” said the doctor with a chuckle, as they sat together after dinner, as usual, upon the day of his return.

“I did nothing of the kind, sir,” returned the baronet angrily.

“Well, your servants did it for you, then, and I presume by your orders. Mr Brougham himself could not have exhibited his patriotism more significantly. The Abbey was a blaze of light from basement to garret.”

“That is a lie!” cried Sir Robert, making

the glasses jump with the force with which he brought his fist down upon the table.

“A what?” exclaimed the doctor, rising from the table livid with rage. “Do you, then, call me a liar?”

“Yes,” thundered the baronet; “like all your radical crew.”

The two men that had so long been nearer and dearer to each other than brothers never again interchanged one word.

Dr Haldane left the Abbey, solemnly protesting that he would never cross its threshold again during the lifetime of its owner; and he kept his determination even in the hour when his old friend lay a-dying.

Now, poor Lady Lisgard was the person to blame for all this. Before Sir Robert and she had set out on their visit, the house-

keeper had told her that everybody was going to illuminate their houses on the 12th, on account of what had happened in London with respect to Queen Caroline; and she was afraid that if some sign of rejoicing was not shewn at the Abbey, the mob would do some damage. A candle in each of the windows would save a hundred pounds of mischief belike. "Well, then, put a candle," said my Lady, not dreaming that by that simple order she was wounding her husband in his most vital point, his pride, and making a sacrifice of principles that he held only second to those of the Christian Religion. She did not even think it necessary to tell him that she had left this command behind her; but when she heard him praise the determination of the friend with whom they stayed, not to submit to the dictation of the

rabble, she had not the heart to tell him of the mistake she had committed, and which it was by that time too late to remedy. That mistake, and, still more, her unfortunate reticence, had caused the quarrel, destined never to be healed, betwixt her husband and his friend. They both forgave her, but she could not forgive herself. It seemed to her that she could never do enough to shew how sorry she was for her grievous fault. We have said how she made up so far as was in her power, in love and duty to Sir Robert, for the loss of his friend; but to that friend himself, self-exiled from her roof, and out of the reach, as it were, of reparation, how was she to atone for the wrong she had inadvertently done him? When the quarrel first took place, the doctor's wrath was quite unquenchable; he

would listen to nothing except an apology—a debt which Sir Robert (although he certainly owed it) most resolutely refused to pay. The doctor, who had hitherto confined his Whiggism to after-dinner eloquence, and coarse but biting epigrams, which had earned him the reputation of a philosopher with those of his own party, thereupon became an active political partisan, and not only voted at election-time, but canvassed with might and main against the Lisgard interest; nay, he even composed, as we have ventured to hint, satirical ballads against the paternal rule of that respectable family.

But although neither sex nor age was spared in those savage days, not one word did the vengeful doctor breathe about my Lady; nay, it was on record that when some too uncompromising apostle of Liberty had reflected upon

her humble extraction in the presence of that friend estranged, he had risen to his full height of five feet eight, and levelled the slanderer to the earth. Perhaps my Lady did not esteem him the less upon that account ; but certain it was that the first visit she paid after Sir Robert's death was to the doctor's house, taking with her, it was said, from her husband's dying lips, a message of affectionate reconciliation. The baronet had never brought himself to alter the words in his will by which he had appointed his tried and loving friend, Bartholomew Haldane, trustee for his children ; and of course the doctor accepted his trust. He never could be induced to visit the Abbey, although his oath no longer forbade it ; but the Lisgard children were his constant guests, and his only son, Arthur Haldane, was as another brother to them, and almost as another

son to my Lady. His nature was grave and serious, like Sir Richard's, but very tender withal, and she felt that she could confide in him what she could not have confided to the rigid young baronet, although he was her own flesh and blood; nevertheless, or perhaps for that very reason, when she took Arthur's arm that April morning, upon pretence of shewing him some alterations that were proposed to be made at a place in the Abbey-grounds called the "Watersmeet," she thought it necessary to preface what she was going to say to him with an explanation.

"My dear Arthur," said she, when they had got out of view of the house, "you will think it cruel that I have brought you away from the society of that charming young lady, Miss Aynton, to chat with an old woman like me, who have boys of my own to take counsel

with; but the fact is, I have inveigled you hither to get an opinion from you which I could scarcely ask of your learned brother."

This was conferring a brevet rank upon Sir Richard, who had not yet been called to the Bar, although he was reading for it; while Arthur had been in practice for some years.

"My dear Lady Lisgard," returned the other smiling, "I must, for my professional credit's sake, enter my protest against what you say about Miss Aynton, as irrelevant, and travelling out of the record, but besides that, it is a delusion which I should be sorry to see you entertain. Miss Aynton is nothing whatever to me; although, indeed, if she were, I would rather chat with you than with any young lady (save one) in Christendom."

The young barrister's tone was so unnecessarily earnest and impressive, that one so acute

as Lady Lisgard could scarcely have failed to see that he courted inquiry concerning such excess of zeal. She either saw it not, however, or refused to see it ; and he was far too delicate by nature to press it upon her attention. “ And now, *ma mère*,” continued he, taking her hand in his affectionately, “ in what way can I be of use to you ? ”

“ By your good sense, and by your good feeling, Arthur. I need the aid of your talents and your virtues, too, dear boy ; I want your best advice, and then your promise that you will never disclose that I have asked it.”

“ You shall have both those, *ma mère*. As the pashas say to the sultan when there is nothing to fear : ‘ I bring you my head ; ’ as for my heart—that has been devoted to you these many years.”

CHAPTER VIII.

AT THE WATERSMEET.

LADY LISGARD and her young friend had by this time arrived at the Watersmeet, a lovely spot, where the river branched into two streams, the one still pursuing its course through the Lisgard property, and the other escaping under a sort of swing palisade—which prevented the passage of boats—into public life. The way had lain for some time along a broad beech-walk, paved with an exquisite checker-work of light and shade; but they now came upon an open spot on

which a rustic bench was placed for those who would admire at leisure what was called the home-view. The prospect from this seat was remarkable, since it took in all that was best worth seeing at Mirk, without laying under contribution anything, with the exception of the church, that was not the property of the family. Two sides of the Abbey, an irregular but very picturesque structure, could from here be seen, at a distance not so great as to lose the bolder features of the architecture, or to mass the ivy which Time had hung about the southern front; the sloping lawn, with its marble fountain, and alcove of trellis-work, which the spring-time had but sparingly clothed with leaf; the boat-house, with its carved and gilded roof—all these, backed by a living wall of stately woods, made up a charming

picture. The Park lay across the stream, which, although both broad and deep, was only used by pleasure-boats ; and above the one-arched bridge which linked it with the hither bank beyond the lawn, stood up the gray church tower. Gazing upon this view, not as one who had seen it a thousand times before, and might behold it as often again, but with eyes that had a strange yearning and regret in them, Lady Lisgard thus addressed her companion.

“ I want to speak to you about my Walter, Arthur. A mother, alas ! cannot know her son as his friend knows him ; and you, I believe, are Walter’s truest friend ”—

“ One moment, Lady Lisgard,” interrupted the young man gravely ; “ everybody is Walter’s friend, but some are his flatterers. I must tell you at once that he is displeased

with me at present because I am not one of those."

"Yes; you have warned him of some danger, and he is piqued because he thinks that is treating him as a child."

"Since you know that, *ma mère*, you know all that is necessary to be said. Go on."

"What is the bond, Arthur, that links my Walter to this person Derrick? I pray you, do not hesitate to tell me. There is more depends upon your answer than you can possibly guess."

"Really, Lady Lisgard," returned the young man hesitatingly, "you ask a difficult thing, and, in truth, a delicate. There are some things, as you say, which a son does not tell his mother, and far less wishes to have told to her by another. Women and men take such different views of the same matter. If

men are vicious—which I do not deny—in their love of horse-racing, for instance, women reprobate it in an exaggerated way.”

“Horse-racing!” murmured Lady Lisgard, clasping her hands. “Does my Walter bet? Is he a gambler?”

“I did not say that,” answered the young man with irritation. “If you insist upon making me a tale-bearer, Lady Lisgard, do not at least heighten the colour of my scandals.”

“I beg your pardon, Arthur; I was wrong. Perhaps this eagerness to suspect the worst is the cause of that distrust which the young entertain of the old. And yet *he* might have told me all, and been sure of forgiveness.”

“Doubtless, *ma mère*; but then we don’t tell our mothers all. Now, pray, be reasonable, and assure yourself that Walter is no worse

than other young men, because he makes up a book upon the Derby."

"*You* do not do so, Arthur. Why should Walter?"

"*I* do not, *ma mère*, because my taste does not lie in that direction. My vices—and I have plenty—are of another sort. I unsettle my mind with heterodox publications. I entertain opinions which are subversive of the principles of good government as believed in by your Ladyship's family. You know in what sort of faith I have been brought up. Moreover, I live in town among a slow, hard-working set, who have neither time nor inclination for going to race-courses; and, indeed, I am now getting a little practice at the bar myself. If I were a handsome young swell in a regiment of Light Dragoons, then, instead of publishing that amusing work

upon the *Law of Entail*, which, with a totally inexcusable pang, I saw lying upon your library-table to-day *uncut*, I should without doubt be making a betting-book. Having no call towards that sort of employment, however, I am very severe upon it. I term it waste of time, loss of money, &c. ; and in the case of your son, I have even been so foolish as to remonstrate with him on that very account—an interference which, I fear, has cost me his friendship."

"Has he lost money through this man Derrick, think you ?"

"Not yet, or they would not be upon such good terms. A turf friendship ceases at the first bad bet. The fact is, it was about his intimacy with this drunken fellow that I ventured to speak ; it increases the misunderstanding already unhappily existing

between your sons ; for you know what a dislike Sir Richard has shewn for this person, while for Walter himself I believe him to be a most dangerous acquaintance."

"Dangerous ?" inquired my Lady hurriedly
—“ how mean you dangerous ? ”

"He is bad company for any young man, and he has acquaintances who are worse. Walter is 'hail-fellow-well-met' with everybody, and may find himself one day so deeply involved with these folks, that extrication may not be easy. He has plenty of wits, and well knows how to take care of himself in a general way ; but all his great advantages are useless to him among this particular class. His genial wit, his graceful ways, his tenderness of heart—nay, even his high spirits, all go for nothing with such vulgar good-for-naughts, whom, in my opinion, he will be

lucky not to find downright cheats and scoundrels."

"Is this man Derrick, then," inquired my Lady, gazing fixedly upon the dark swirling stream, "irredeemably base and vicious?"

"No, not so," answered the young man frankly; "he has the lees of good still left in him, without which, indeed, he would be less harmful. Walter was taken from the first with his openness and candour—which are so great that he seems quite lost to the sense of shame—and with his lavish generosity, which is probably the result of rapid fortune-making. He made five thousand pounds or so, it seems, in a few weeks at gold-digging, and I should think he was in a fair way to spend it in almost as short a period."

"Perhaps he may have been spoilt by that mode of life," observed Lady Lisgard pitifully.

“I speak as I find, *ma mère*,” said the young man, shrugging his shoulders. “It is nothing to us if this man may have been a good boy at one time. You may charitably suppose, if you like, that he has been crossed in love, or unfortunately married—— Ah! that reminds you, I see, of his *tendresse* for Mistress Forest. Since it moves you so deeply, you must look that matter in the face, Lady Lisgard, and very soon, if you wish to keep Mary. If something about this fellow pleases Walter, you need not wonder that it has fascinated your waiting-maid.”

“Is it this fancy of his, then, think you, which alone keeps him here at Mirk?” asked my Lady, who had started for a moment as though stung, but was now once more looking thoughtfully at the river.

“No. Being totally without anchorage in

the world, the cable-strand of a partnership in a race-horse at present at Chifney's stables here holds him to the place where he can be near his property. His pecuniary affairs are, as I understand, bound up in that four-footed creature, and beyond them he has nothing to look to. You who have all things settled about you, Lady Lisgard, with home, children, and friends, and from whom so many interests radiate, are doubtless unable to picture to yourself such a state of things. But if this man should marry Mistress Forest, and still keep his share in *Menelaus*, I should not be surprised if he were to take up his residence at Mirk altogether."

"God in his mercy forbid!" ejaculated my Lady, clasping her hands.

"My dear Lady Lisgard!" cried the young man, in alarm at her emotion, "I am afraid

I must have said something very foolish, to have frightened you about this fellow thus. After all, there is no harm done, and I may have been very wrong—as my mind misgives me, I have been very officious—in anticipating any harm."

"No, no," cried my Lady, rocking herself to and fro; "your good sense has only told you Truth. Do not—do not forsake me, Arthur. I look to you not only for warning, but for succour. Are you sure that you have told me all? Is there no other reason besides those you have mentioned why this man, having lain in wait, and entrapped my Walter, should sit down before this house, and, as it were, besiege it thus?"

"Well, Lady Lisgard," returned the young man gravely, "there is, I fear, another reason; but it is one I am very loath to

speak of—— Are you cold, *ma mère*? I fear it is too early for this sitting by the river.”

“ No, Arthur, I am not cold. Why should you hesitate to tell me anything about this —this stranger ? ”

“ Because, Lady Lisgard, I respect you as though you were indeed my mother—as you have shewn towards me always a mother’s love ; and this matter in some sort concerns yourself.”

“ *Myselv?* ” whispered my Lady hoarsely. “ No, not myself, good Arthur. What can there be in common between this man—whom I have never seen—and me ? ”

“ Ay, there it is,” replied the young man quietly. “ It would have been far better had you not shut yourself up, as you have done these three months, expressly to avoid

this fellow—by that means making him think himself of consequence."

"Who says I have done that?" asked my Lady vehemently, "Who dares to say it? Why should I fear him? Why should I think about him well or ill? What is he to me, or I to him?"

"Ay, what indeed, *ma mère!* All this arises from giving ourselves such airs, and carrying matters with so high a hand: you have nothing but Sir Richard's pride to thank for it, to which I must say, in this instance, you have injudiciously, and, most unlike yourself, succumbed. It was a harsh measure, surely, to forbid this man your house, when coming, as you knew he would, upon a lawful errand of courtship; but to serve the landlord of an inn with notice of ejectment if a certain guest should not remove

himself—which your eldest son has caused to be done with Steve—is a most monstrous exercise of authority. No wonder this Derrick was greatly irritated; any man so treated would be: but, in the present case, Sir Richard has made the unhappiest mistake. He is dealing with one who is to the full as obstinate as himself; and (what makes the odds overwhelmingly against him) a man entirely reckless and unprincipled. Your son does not understand how any one can be proud who is not a gentleman. Now, this fellow is possessed of a very devil of pride. He is come from an outlying colony, where there is conventional respect for nothing; and where every man does pretty much what is right in his own eyes. He has been lucky there; raised by a freak of fortune, and not by plodding industry

(although he has doubtless worked hard too), to comparative wealth, he is by no means inclined to consider people his superiors. A beggar on horseback if you will, he is still *mounted*, and may ride in Rotten Row itself if it pleases him. He resents, of course, being thus meddled with; he is one of that class who would deem it a great liberty in the law should it punish his actual transgressions—who would think it hard to be smitten for his faults—but to be interfered with in a harmless avocation, such as love-making, or to be dictated to as to where he is to reside, stirs his bile, I can imagine, pretty considerably. It is my belief that he would have got tired of Mirk and Mary too before this, and wandered off somewhere else, scattering his bank-notes on the way, poor devil, like the hare in a school-boy's paper

chase, but for this unjustifiable attempt on the part of Sir Richard to curtail his liberties. I am sure, also, that Walter was at first inclined to patronise this man, for the very reason that his brother had exhibited towards him such uncalled-for animosity."

"This may be all very true," said my Lady sighing, but at the same time not without a certain air of relief; "but I cannot understand how it affects *me*, Arthur."

"Well, you see, my dear Lady Lisgard, although Sir Richard issues these foolish edicts, it is you who are responsible for them; and I have no doubt this Derrick has been told as much. At least, I hear, that over his cups he has declared he will never leave Mirk till he has had a sight of this Queen of all the Roosias (as he terms you), who holds herself so—— Pardon me, *ma mère*; I was wrong

to repeat this fellow's impertinence. Heaven help us ! Why, my Lady has fainted ! ”

Arthur Haldane spoke the truth. For the moment, Lady Lisgard's mind was freed from all its anxieties, of whatever nature they might be. The young man sprang down the bank, and dipping his handkerchief in the stream, applied its wet folds to her forehead. Gradual and slow the lifeblood flowed again, and with it thought, although confused and tangled.

“ Save me, save my Walter ! ” murmured she. “ Tell him I will die first. He shall never look upon my face.”

“ He never shall, *ma mère*, ” said the young man soothingly, while he chafed my Lady's stiffened fingers.

“ Keep him away ! ” cried she, endeavouring to rise ; “ he is tearing off my wedding-ring. Help ! help ! ”

“No, no, it is not he; it is I, Arthur Haldane—a well-meaning fool, but who has worked a deal of mischief. I have told you all I know, and I wish my tongue had been cut out first. It makes my heart bleed to see you thus distressed.”

“Then give me comfort, Arthur,” groaned my Lady; “you have warned me well, but what is the use of warning without advice. How shall I make him cease to persecute us? Gold will not buy him. I have heard of such a man, who, being bribed, cried but the more ‘Give, give;’ as the whirlpool swallows ship after ship, and yet gapes for more—for navies.”

“Bribe him? No, Heaven forbid! That, indeed, would be the very way to keep him what he is—to make that chronic which is now, let us hope, but a passing ailment. But I would take care, if I were you, that nothing

further be done to irritate him. He may revenge himself—I only say he *may*—by doing Walter some ill turn. And, above all, you must persuade Mistress Forest to give him his *congé*. If once you get her to say ‘No,’ of her own freewill, he will soon tire of haunting the Abbey; while, if his race-horse does not do the great things expected of him—and what race-horse ever did?—he will soon tire of Mirk itself.

My Lady shook her head.

“Come, *ma mère*, there is no need for despondency about this fellow’s going—nor, indeed, for much apprehension if he stays—and, moreover, I really think the matter lies in your own hands; at all events, you have more influence over your waiting-maid than any one else, and my advice is that you speak to her at once.”

“Yes, I will speak to her,” said Lady Lisgard mechanically. “Thank you, good Arthur, much.” She rose from her seat, and, heaving a deep sigh as she turned from the fair home-scene, was about to saunter to the beech-walk, when the young man laid his hand upon her arm. It was the lightest touch, but, like that of an enchanter’s wand, it seemed to remove all trace of selfish trouble, and in its place to evoke the tenderest sympathy for another.

“You wish to speak to me upon your own account, dear boy; and, alas! I know the subject you would choose.”

“*Alas, ma mère!* why *alas?* I want to talk to you about your Letty.”

“Not now, not now,” cried Lady Lisgard. “Spare me, dear Arthur, for this time; I feel

so unhinged and woe-stricken, I can give you neither 'Yea' nor 'Nay.'"

"I hoped that you would not have thought of 'Nay,' dear Lady Lisgard," said the young man pathetically. "I did not look for the same cruel arguments of difference of station and the like from *you* as from—others. I shall have a home to offer your daughter such as will be wanting in no comfort, although it may not be one so fair as yonder Abbey. My professional prospects are, I am glad to say"—

"It is not *that*, dear boy," broke in Lady Lisgard hastily. "You should know me better than to suppose so, Arthur; yet I cannot, nay, I dare not tell you what it is. It may be you will hear the truth some day, though never from these lips; it may be—I pray Heaven for that—that

you will never need to hear it. But for the present, press me for no reply; for when you ask to be my daughter's husband, Arthur Haldane, you know not what you ask."

"That is what Sir Richard says," replied the young man bitterly. "The Lisgards are such an ancient race, their blood so pure, their scutcheon"—

"Spare me, spare me, Arthur!" cried my Lady earnestly. "Give me only time, and I will do my best. If I have said anything to wound you, ah! forgive it for the sake of those old times, which you may think of some day, boy, not without tears, when I shall be to you but a memory. Think then—whatever's said—'Well, she was always kind to me; and when I wooed her daughter (you will own) she was kind too, although

I did not think so then.'” My Lady's face was hidden in her hands, but through the fair white fingers, as though the diamonds in her rings had started from their sockets, oozed the large tears.

“ Dear Lady Lisgard, good, kind friend, *mère*,” exclaimed the young man, deeply moved, “ what sorrow is it which overwhelms you thus? I pray you, let me share it. I am young and strong, and I love you and yours, and there is help in me. Come, let me try.”

“ No, Arthur, no,” answered my Lady gravely, as she once more arose, and re-entered the beech-walk. “ I must bear my own burden —that is only right and fitting. Heaven knows I am willing to suffer to the uttermost, if I be only permitted to suffer alone. It is when the innocent suffer for us that

the burden galls the most. No; you can do nothing for me but keep silence about all that we have spoken of to-day. Not to do so, would be to do me a grievous hurt. You have passed your word, Arthur Haldane—remember that."

"Yes, *ma mère*," replied the young man sighing. "The Haldanes always keep their promises, you know."

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE LIBRARY.

OF all the pleasant rooms—and they were many—that were to be found at Mirk Abbey, the Library was by far the most charming. An architect might have said that the rest of the house had been somewhat sacrificed to it; a bookworm might have wished it gloomier and more retired; but for a lover of literature who was also a judge of beauty, it was well-nigh perfect. It was upon the first floor, and occupied the space of at least three reception-rooms.

Long as it was, its excessive breadth might have been objected to, but that the effect of this was diminished to exactly the right proportions by huge double bookcases, which jutted out at right angles from the walls; thus the place was broken up, as it were, into a number of little studies, closed in upon three sides, but open, of course, towards what in a church would be called the aisle. This aisle, still a broad space, was set alternately with flower-vases and statues of white marble, though none of these were so tall as to hide from one standing at the door the view of the huge painted window at the southern end. In summer-time, this window was swung back, and all the garden scents and drowsy sounds—the level sweep of the scythe upon the lawn, and the murmur of the bees in the limes—were suffered to enter

in. In winter, being closed, what light there was came glowing through the pictured panes, or through small windows far above the level of the eye, so that, in that well-warmed room, you could not tell that it *was* winter.

And yet this stately apartment was seldom used in either season. Letty would sometimes take a Godly book from that part of the place marked in dull gold *Devotional*, but always carried it away to read in her own chamber; and Sir Richard now and then would refresh himself in the topographical department by taking down the *History of Wheatshire*, where all the Family Seats were duly pictured, and the linked sweetness of the genealogy of the owners long drawn out; but the Lisgards were not a reading race. Moreover, when they did

read, it was chiefly out of modern books temporarily supplied by Mr Mudie, or works most glorious to behold as to their bindings, and without which no lady's drawing-room can be said to be complete, but which happily are rarely seen in libraries. My Lady herself had a goodly store of books in her own boudoir, including most of the French and English classics, all presented to her at divers times by her late husband, and all read, if not for her own pleasure, then for his; she therefore visited the Library more rarely than any one except Walter, who would as soon have thought of visiting the laundry. The last time she had gone thither was just after Miss Aynton's first arrival, when she had taken that young lady to see some curious missals there deposited, containing certain

initial letters which Rose was desirous of copying.

She enters it now alone upon her return from that interview with Arthur Haldane at the Watersmeet—on a very different errand. She is no longer the kind of somewhat stately hostess, doing her young guest a pleasure, and at the same time perhaps taking a pardonable pride in shewing her the gem of the Abbey—its Library—for the first time. All pride, all stateliness, seem to have departed from that anxious face; her figure, however, is erect as of old, and her step as firm, as she closes the door of the vast room behind her, and walks towards its southern end. She looks neither to left nor right, for she is in search of none of those volumes which line the Library on either side. The place for which she is

bound is in a far corner next the window, but very indirectly lighted by it; a small "study," where, if such a thing as dust were permitted to accumulate at the Abbey at all, it would certainly lie; and where it did lie; a spot unvisited for years, ever since it had been determined that Sir Richard's profession should be the Law, when certain books were taken from it, and carried up to town to stock his chambers; for over this little literary den was written Legal. Truly, as the phrase goes, "it was not a place for a lady," that dusky little chamber, lined with its bulky, calf-bound volumes, mostly in series, and often as not connected with one another by that emblem of their contents, a spider's web. What could my Lady have come hither to cull from such unpromising books? Is it

possible that, unmindful of the proverb, that he who is his own lawyer has got a fool for his client, she can be in search of legal advice gratis? It is plain that she is in doubt, alas, even where to find the information of which she is in search. Her soft white hand wanders from tome to tome, and drags down one after another from its dusty shelf, until she has peopled the sunbeams anew with motes; but her large gray eyes find nothing to arrest them as they wander over the arid pages, although they grow weary with their task.

At last, however, they seem to have been more fortunate. For the first time, my Lady takes her seat beside the slanting desk, and with her head supported by her hands, like one who is in need of all her wits, she reads on patiently enough. She cons the

matter over twice or thrice, then sighs, and putting a thin slip of paper in the book to mark the place, returns it to its shelf, and pursues her search as before. Out of several score of volumes, four only seem to have served her purpose, and even from them it is evident that she has gleaned no comfort, but rather confirmation of some fear. Her face is more hopeless than it was a while ago ; her sigh—and she sighs deep and often—has despair in it, as well as sorrow. From her wearied eyes, as she gazes upon the opened casement—through which comes a dreamy music in the flutter of the young leaves on a neighbouring elm, and the silver leap of the fountain on the lawn—tear follows tear, although she knows it not, and glides down the new-made furrows in her cheeks.

The luncheon gong was beaten an hour ago, and then was taken out into the garden for her especial behoof, and beaten again ; but my Lady heard it not. She has neither eyes nor ears for the Present at all. She is thinking of some Future more dark and terrible than death itself, a day of dishonour and disgrace, that is creeping slowly but surely upon her and hers. The young leaves babble of it already, and the fountain with its talking water, and every whispering breath of April wind ; and now she listens to them ; and now she tries in vain to think and think ; and now she listens to them perforce again. They are comforters these mysterious voices, and do but pretend to prattle of her woes, in order that they may woo her to oblivion ; for presently the tired arms can no more bear the burden of that piteous face, but

sink down on the desk, and on those soft and rounded cushions droops the careworn head ; and the eyelids that have scarce shut throughout the livelong night, nor through many a night before, are closed in slumber. The bee-music, the falling water, and the lullaby of the April leaves, through Nature's kindly hands, have given my Lady a nepenthe draught ; and, thanks to it, she has forgotten her woes ; nay, more, it has substituted for them joys borrowed from the unreturning Past, which, while we tarry in Dreamland, are as real as any.

My Lady is once more a fisherman's daughter, upon the banks of Blea. The river that flows beside her father's door is almost as salt as the sea itself, and twice a day the sea itself comes up and fills the creeks, and sets afloat the boats and colliers

that lie sideways on the oozy beach. When it retires, she longs to be taken with it, for ere that tide can reach the open sea, it must needs pass by the port of Bleamouth, where her lover Ralph dwells. Young as she is, she has been wooed by others, and they better matches than this roving sailor, who, although he has saved a little money, does not know, says her father, how to keep it; and when that is gone, how will he keep himself save by going to sea again; much more, then, how will he keep wife Lucy and a household? But these wise sayings are naught in Lucy's ears, in which love whispers always its smooth prophecies, and Ralph's rich laugh dispels the old man's forebodings, or plays upon them as though they were the very strings of mirth.

As handsome and stout-hearted a lad he is

as ever was fitted to make his own way through the world ; able enough to thrust to left and right all jostling compeers, and by no means one to lack or to let those dear to him lack, while bread is to be got by sweat of brow. A smile comes o'er my Lady's face, and makes it young again, the while she dreams ; for now she sees his signals in the coming boat, and now himself, and now he leaps ashore, and clasps her with his stalwart arm, and now her fingers play with the dark locks that curl above his tanned and manly brow. 'Tis more than half a lifetime back—but she knows not that—and the colour comes again to the wan cheek as though it were a maiden's, and once more love awakens in her widowed heart. He speaks ; but ere his tongue can shape the words, a sense of doubt begins to perplex and pain her. She

is a girl, and yet a woman in the vale of years ; a fisher's daughter though a lady bred, with all the circumstances of rank and wealth about her ; the voice is her lover's voice, and yet sounds strangely like another's ; she is on the borderland 'twixt waking and sleeping, where, as in a dissolving view, the coming and the passing pictures interlace and exchange features, and the Dream and the Reality struggle together for life. Some one is speaking, however, that is certain, and the voice, as no woman can doubt, is tremulous and love-laden.

“ And yet, Rose—for I may call you Rose, may I not?—beautiful as these pictures are, I do not think they are more exquisite than those which you have painted yourself.”

“ You flatter me, Sir Richard,” returned a second voice, with which my Lady was no

better acquainted than with the first ; for although she could not but be aware of who the speakers were, since they addressed one another by their names, she did not recognise her own son's speech, so changed it was from its ordinary polite but icy tones ; while Rose Aynton's, upon the other hand, generally so quiet and submissive, were tinged with a mocking bitterness. If Sir Richard Lisgard was really about to lay his fortune at the feet of this penniless girl, it seemed strange indeed that she should reply to him in so unnatural a key. That the delirious joy that might well be at her heart should not be altogether repressible, was to be expected, and that her tongue should falter in endeavouring to conceal her triumph ; but there was that in the young girl's accents different from anything that could be thus

explained. Instead of trembling and hesitation in her speech, there was sheer scorn. Perhaps my Lady should have come forth at once from where she sat an involuntary eavesdropper; but it must be allowed that the temptation to remain was very great. Moreover, there were reasons why she could not explain her own presence in that particular portion of the Library; and again, should she disclose herself, the young people would feel no less uncomfortable than though they should even discover at last that their interview had not been so solitary as they imagined, for how did she know what had occurred while she was sleeping, and how should she persuade Miss Rose, even if her word was sufficient for Richard, that she *had* been sleeping during that critical period? True, if it was certain that the offer about

to be made would be accepted, as indeed there was every likelihood that it would be, it was highly expedient—for various reasons known to my Lady—that she should step forward, and prevent matters from going further; but so strange did the girl's voice strike upon her experienced ear, that Lady Lisgard waited in hopes of she scarce knew what—some almost miracle that might make her personal interposition unnecessary. At the same time her curiosity became so excessive during the protracted pause that followed Rose's “You flatter me,” that she ventured to peer round the corner of the recess wherein she sat, which was now far more in shade than when she had entered it at noon.

They were standing not very far from her—those two unconscious young people—in

front of a huge portfolio, which leant against a statue of Cupid and Psyche. The old, old tale of love which the sculpture typified was evidently being anew repeated by one at least of the living pair. Sir Richard, who had been turning over the pictures, kept his hand mechanically on one of them, but his eyes were fixed with a winning softness; which even his mother had never seen in them before, upon his fair companion. Through one of the small western windows, the last gleam of the dying sun had found its way, and rested upon his crisp brown curls; his manly face glowed in a golden haze, while in his eyes there beamed a light that no sun can give, and mellower than the rays of moon or star.

“I do not flatter you, sweet Rose,” he said; “I love you.” She too had one hand upon

the picture, and but for it, it seemed for a moment as though she would have fallen, so deadly pale she grew the while he spoke. Her eyelids quivered, and then slowly sank like two white rose-leaves on her cheek ; while her unoccupied hand fell from her pale lips, and hung down by her side quite motionless.

“She cannot give him nay,” thought Lady Lisgard ; “the girl is overcome with her great joy.”

“Why do you not speak, dear Rose ?” continued Sir Richard ; “or may I take your silence for consent, and thus set loving seal”—

He moved towards her, and round her dainty waist had placed his arm, when she sprang from him like a frightened fawn, who, although so seeming tame that it will hover

nigh, and even follow one, darts off in terror when we strive to caress it.

“No, Sir Richard, no,” cried she; “I cannot marry you—I dare not; and I will not. You are much too proud and arrogant for me.”

“But not *to* you, Rose,” pleaded the young man earnestly. “You shall be my mistress, I your servant always. If I have ever been proud to you, I pray you to forgive it. I do beseech your pardon. It seemed at first that I was right to be so. You do not understand how one like me, so”—

“So well born and so rich,” interrupted the young girl quietly, looking up into his face with steady gaze. “Yes, I understand that well, Sir Richard; and I, on the other hand, a dependent girl, so inferior to the sort of

bride that you had a right to look for; it was well to keep me at a respectful distance."

"No, not so, Rose," cried the other hastily; "I swear that you are inferior to no woman whom I have ever seen. But I did not wish — I thought, at first, that it would not be for your happiness" —

"And your first thought was right, Sir Richard," broke in the other bitterly. "When you said to yourself, I will not encourage this young girl to think it possible that she should ever be the mistress of Mirk Abbey, you were wise. You did right to hold yourself aloof, to behave with studied stiffness and formality, to let me know though I might worship your exalted station, and admire your handsome face" —

“ Rose ! Rose !”

“ Ay, it is Rose now, but it was Miss Aynton then,” continued she, beating her foot upon the floor. “ You determined, I say, within yourself that I should never so forget our relative positions as to misconstrue any attentions you might please to pay me ; you held yourself so high, and stooped so condescendingly when you did stoop, that, upon my part at least, you resolved to nip the young beginnings of love, if such there should be, in their very bud. And, Sir Richard Lisgard, you succeeded.”

She rose to her full height, and pointed at him with her white hand contemptuously ; her swan-like bosom moved, with rapid ebb and flow, in angry scorn ; her curling lips gave wormwood to her words. And yet, although he felt her biting speech, the young man

thought he had never seen her half so beautiful, half so worthy to be his wife.

“It is you who are proud now, Rose,” returned he, speaking with effort. “I did not think that I could ever have heard such words from a woman’s lips, and yet have sought to woo her. It is your turn to play the tyrant; but though, by Heaven, you look every inch a queen”—

“I thank you, sir,” interrupted the girl coldly; “but you need say no more. There is no necessity to offer me that one more chance which your generosity suggests to you. However incomprehensible and audacious, coming from these humble lips, may such an answer sound, Sir Richard Lisgard is refused.”

“Rose, dear Rose,” cried the young man passionately; “if this be punishment, do not

push it, I pray you, further than I can bear. There is something in your face in such ill accordance with your speech, that I cannot yet despair. Is it not possible, sweet girl, that at some future time—not now, but when you have seen how humble and devoted I can be, that you may teach your heart to love me?"

"No." A full and rounded word, without a flaw of doubt to mar its clearness; a sentence irreversible; a judgment against which he felt there could be no appeal.

"But look you, Rose," continued the baronet huskily; "it is said that the true love grows after marriage. Suppose I am content to wed you on that chance, as in very truth I am. Look you, the scene is fair you behold through yonder window, and all that you see is mine. The Abbey, too, is mine, or will be so at

my mother's death." [A shadow of pain flits across my Lady's face, to hear her son speak thus so lightly of that loss, to please a girl whom he has not known six months, and who does not even love him.] "I have broad acres, girl, fields, farms—a goodly rent-roll. My wife—the Lady Lisgard—will have more than enough of wealth to maintain her high position. Rose! have you no ambition?"

Miss Aynton here again grew strangely agitated; once more her cheeks grew pale, and her limbs trembled beneath her.

"Wretched girl! can she indeed be going to sell herself?" thought my Lady.

"There is nothing," pursued the wooer, perceiving his advantage, "which will be out of your reach. You will mix with those same persons to whose society you have been already accustomed, but in a very different

relation towards them; you will be their equal in station, and they will be compelled to acknowledge that superiority in all other respects which they have refused to see in you while a mere dependent on your aunt's caprice. You will be enabled, I do not say to repay scorn for scorn—for your sweet nature is incapable of such revenge—but to extend to those who have wounded you forgiveness; to return each kindness fifty-fold."

"Sir Richard Lisgard," replied the young girl, speaking slowly, but with great distinctness, "my answer has been given you already. It is true that your last arguments moved me, but not for the reason you imagine. I can marry you neither for love nor for money. You pique yourself, I think, on being a gentleman; being so, you will cease

to press me further. I am conscious of the honour you have done me in this matter, and I thank you; but I decline your offer."

The young man bowed, but without speaking. His features, which had softened to an extraordinary degree throughout their interview, began to assume a look even haughtier than before; his pride was all the greater since he had forced himself to stoop in vain.

"I have only one thing, then, to request, Miss Aynton," said he after a long silence. "I trust that you will not permit what has just occurred to curtail your stay at Mirk. It is understood that you are to remain here until after the celebration of—of my majority." He could scarcely get the word out, poor fellow: he had looked forward so to her loving sympathy upon that proud occasion,

which now seemed emptied of all its happy auguries.

“Do not fear, Sir Richard,” returned the girl with pity; “no one shall know that the heir of Mirk has met with this disappointment. I will remain here, since you wish it. Your behaviour towards me needs no alteration to conceal the fact that you have ever been my lover.”

He had once more so reinstated himself in his proof-armour of pride, that the young baronet was not even aware that this last shaft had any barb.

“I thank you, Miss Aynton,” said he frigidly; “if at any time it should be within my power to do you or yours a service, please to command me to the uttermost.”

He bowed, and strode away; she heard him close the door, neither softly nor in anger,

and then his measured step upon the carpetless oaken stair without.

“ I have not broken his heart, that’s certain,” muttered Rose Aynton, with a crooked smile; “ the lover was lost in the patron soon indeed.”

CHAPTER X.

MISS ROSE AYNTON "COMES OUT."

FOR some minutes there was a total silence in the vast apartment, very oppressive to at least one of the two persons present. "How long did this proud girl intend to remain and keep her a prisoner?" thought my Lady. She was rejoiced that Miss Aynton had refused her son, but at the same time angry with her for having done so. Rose must surely have had some motive for it far deeper than the mere revenging herself upon him for fancied slights. And yet Letty,

who was in the girl's confidence, seemed certain that she had no accepted lover—no previous engagement, such as alone seemed a sufficient reason for rejecting so advantageous a proposal. Perhaps she was even now repenting with tears the determination which had earned for her so dearly-bought a triumph. My Lady ventured to look forth once more. Yes, the poor girl was doubtless crying bitterly. Her face was hidden in her hands, but there was a convulsive movement of the round white shoulders that told its tale of inward grief. "Poor thing, poor thing!" My Lady's kind heart yearned towards her now that she was sorry for her treatment of her son. Perhaps—not knowing Sir Richard as his mother knew him—she might even now make some hopeless endeavour to win him back to her. If she succeeded, that would be

the worst thing that could possibly happen; and if she failed—as was almost certain—then she would have to suffer all this pain over again. Was it not my Lady's duty, then, to do her best to spare this unhappy motherless girl such bitter disappointment and humiliation, and to comfort her all she could under her present trouble? At all events, after some such manner Lady Lisgard reasoned. She did not stop to think of herself at all—of the imputation of eaves-dropping to which she must necessarily expose herself—but stepped forth at once from the recess, and walked quietly to where Rose was standing. Her footsteps made no noise upon the thick matting that was laid down the centre of the polished floor. As she approached the unconscious girl, she was compelled to acknowledge to herself, for the first time, how strikingly

attractive a young woman Miss Aynton was. She had certainly not the beauty of my Lady's own daughter Letty, nor was she so tall, or perhaps so graceful; but her figure, although it was one likely to get coarse in time, was really perfect; her head, exquisitely set on well-shaped shoulders, was small, but bore such a profusion of black-brown hair as would have furnished half-a-dozen ordinary young ladies with *chignons*; her hands and arms were plump and white. Her eyes—Lady Lisgard thought that she had never seen such wondrous eyes as those which flashed upon her now in sudden recognition, then terror, then rage—not a trace of tears in them, and all the white face cold and still, not puckered up with woe, as she had expected to see it.

“So you have been a spectator, Lady Lisgard, of the late love-scene, have you?”

said Rose Aynton in a low and suppressed tone. “That was very generous and like a gentlewoman—in one’s hostess, too.”

“Hush, Rose; do not say things that you may afterwards be sorry for. I will tell you how it happened.”

“Nay, do not trouble yourself, my Lady; I can guess. You knew Sir Richard had made an appointment with me here, and you wished to hear with what rapturous gratitude the penniless girl would consent to be his bride. I hope you *did* hear, madam, since you took such trouble.”

“Yes, Rose; I did hear. Your cruel words shall not rob you of my sympathy. I am sorry for my son, of course; but I am sorry for you also. I had been worried, vexed by many things of which it is not necessary to tell you; I came hither for solitude, and

wearied out by many a sleepless night—nights of care, girl, such as I trust you may never know—I fell asleep in yonder recess. I never heard you enter the room at all. I woke up while you were speaking, but scarcely knew whether I ought to reveal myself or not. I heard you reject poor Richard ; then, when he had gone, I thought that you repented having done so. I was moved at seeing you look so white and still. I felt for you, Rose, with all my heart, and came out, when I might as easily have remained concealed, to try to comfort you. My poor dear girl ! ”

“ That was very kind,” returned Rose quietly. “ But if I had behaved otherwise, would you then have welcomed me as your daughter-in-law ? Please to tell me that.”

“ If I should say ‘ Yes,’ you would not believe me, Rose. So why ask me such a

question. Moreover, the matter is settled now for ever. He would be a doting lover, indeed, who would forgive such a repulse ; and Richard is the last man in all the world to do so."

"Do you think so ?" answered the young girl with an incredulous smile. " You have forgotten surely your own youth, Lady Lisgard."

" What know you of my youth, girl ?" asked my Lady hastily, her pale face flushing with emotion.

" Nay, do not be angry," returned the other coldly. " I meant nothing, except, that when a woman is young she is very powerful. You say that I have lost Sir Richard, and therefore you pity me. Now, I will wager by this time to-morrow that I could win him back again."

Was this the humble and submissive girl who came to Mirk four months ago, almost from school, and whom she had treated as a mother treats her child? The conscious belle of a London season could not have spoken with a greater confidence; the most practised husband-hunter with a cooler calculation. “Come,” continued Rose, “if you really are so sorry for me, Lady Lisgard, and so distressed upon your son’s account, have I your permission to do my best to repair this common misfortune?”

My Lady could scarce conceal a shudder at the thought how nearly had this cold-blooded scheming girl become her daughter-in-law. Whatever objections she might have had to such a match before—and they were in themselves insuperable—seemed to have grown to twice their former proportions.

The girl's determination and self-confidence alarmed her, too, for that result about which she had before felt so certain. At all hazards, she was resolved to prevent an attempt at reconciliation being made.

“No, Rose; I do not wish you to try to recover the affections of Sir Richard.”

“So, so; then we have the truth at last, Lady Lisgard. You are not willing that I should be daughter-in-law of yours. You grudge me such great good-fortune as to be allied with the race of Lisgards: and yet it fell to your own lot—as I have heard—even in a more unexpected manner.”

“Miss Aynton, what I was is no affair of yours,” replied my Lady with quivering lips. “You have only to remember what I am.”

“I do so, madam, very well. I see you

held in honour by all people, and without doubt, justly. Your position is indeed to me an object of admiration, perhaps, I may add, even of envy. Is it not natural that it should be so? And when your son offers to lift me from my present low estate to place me as high, why should I hesitate to take advantage of such a proposal? I have refused him, it is true; but now, being, as you say, repentant, why should I not strive to recover what I have let slip—wealth, honours, title"—

"Rose Aynton," returned my Lady, clasping the girl's white wrist, and speaking in very earnest but broken tones, "I warn you, do not do it. Even if you succeed, you may not win all you dream of. Strive not, I charge you, for your own sake, to undo what has been done. I have reasons for what I say beyond any that you can guess. If you

would be happy, do not endeavour to ally yourself with this family."

"Lady Lisgard, what *can* you mean?" ejaculated the girl, her white face flushed at last, her wide flashing eyes no longer hard and cynical, and her every feature impatient for reply.

"I mean simply what I say. Seek not to be Richard's wife. If you want money—and I know from your own lips it is not love which prompts you—you shall have such wealth as is mine to give. I had meant it for a different purpose; but that is no matter. Only do not seek to win back my son; and when you leave us, I will bless you for your forbearance—and for your silence, Rose."

"Yes, Lady Lisgard, I will say nothing of all this," returned the girl thoughtfully after

a short pause. “I promise you, too, that I will never speak of love to Sir Richard further ; and as for your offer of a bribe, though I do not know that I have ever shewn myself so greedy as to deserve it—I will forgive you even that.”

“Thank you, thank you, Rose,” answered my Lady eagerly. “I dare say, in my haste and trouble, I may have said things to offend you, and if so, I am very sorry. You have doubtless your troubles too.”

“Yes, I have,” answered the girl gravely ; “and I should like to be alone with them for a little, Lady Lisgard, unless you have anything else to ask of me.”

“Nothing, Rose—nothing ; you have granted all I wished. You will be as undisturbed here as in your own apartment ; nay, even more so ; for Letty will not think of coming

here to seek you out. Nobody ever comes into the Library."

My Lady leaned forward as she spoke, and kissed the girl's smooth brow, cold as a tablet of alabaster, then softly left the room.

Rose Aynton stood for a full minute, listening, eager and motionless as Echo herself, before she stepped to the door, and turned the key.

"No more spying, my Lady!" ejaculated she; "my hostess has her secrets, it seems, as well as I. It would be well if I could discover hers before she found out mine. What could she mean by cautioning me, for my own sake, not to ally myself with the Lisgards? She is not a fool to think to frighten me with a mere gipsy's warning—threatening much, but meaning nothing.

What reasons can those be against my becoming her daughter-in-law, which are 'beyond any that I can guess?' If I could only get this proud dame beneath my thumb, then, indeed, I might recompense myself somewhat for having missed Sir Richard. To think that I should have lost a prize like that through mere humility of mind! 'Yet even if you succeed,' said she, 'you may not win all you dream of.' Those were her very words. 'Haste and trouble' alone could never have suggested them to her, although they may have made her indiscreet enough to utter them. What has put my Lady in such low spirits of late, and kept her so moped up within the Abbey walls? How came she alone here in this place, whither, as she says, 'No one ever comes?' She must have been hidden in yonder recess in

the far corner, or we must needs have seen her, when my love-sick swain and I were walking up and down."

Swift and noiseless, like some beautiful wild beast upon the trail, Rose Aynton crossed the room, and scanned, with a cruel look in her dark eyes, the little study over which was printed *Legal*.

"I never heard that my Lady was given to law," muttered she derisively. "True, she said that she had been sent to sleep, a thing which any one of these folios one might think would compass. But why did she come hither to read at all? There must have been something of interest to attract her. The books on this side do not seem to have been touched for ages; but here—yes, some one has been to these quite lately, for the dust has been disturbed, and here, if

I mistake not, is the dainty print of my Lady's fingers. We are getting warm, as the children say at Hide-and-Seek. What have we here? A slip of paper for a marker, torn cross-wise from an envelope with *Lad* upon it. It was surely imprudent of my Lady to use her own address for such a purpose. *Wills!* Ah, she has been studying the art of making wills, I dare say. Considering Sir Richard is already so well off—and since I am not to be his wife—it is to be hoped she will leave her money to son Walter; and some, too, to poor dear Letty, for she is one who will never learn to help herself in this world. It is well for her that she has not to live by her wits. If she had been in my position, she would have been a governess. Yes, it's all about Wills this book. And why should

not my Lady make a will, being of ripe age, and yet not old enough to sniff that smell of the charnel-house, which renders the operation so unpleasant a duty to the aged? I am afraid—unless, indeed, I could find the will itself—that I have but discovered a mare's nest after all. However, here are more book-markers; come, let us combine our information. *Succession!* That's only the same story. *Illegitimacy!* Great Heaven, but this is more than I had bargained for!"

The girl stepped swiftly to the open window, and pushed the heavy folds of hair behind her ears. "I feel my blood all rushing to my brain, and roaring 'Ruin!'" murmured she. "If this sudden fear has any real foundation, then indeed am I hoist with my own petard. No wonder she warned

me against alliance with her race, if what I here suspect is true. They will need well-born suitors themselves, she meant, to make up for what is lacking in their blood, and mayhap money too. The will of old Sir Robert may be disputed. The Succession—but no, I had forgotten—there is no one to succeed save her two sons, for they have not a relative beyond themselves in the world, these Lisgards ; but the title—that would be lost, of course. That's what she hinted when she said I might not gain the thing I counted on, even though I won Sir Richard. He cannot know of it ; he could not be so proud if he had the least suspicion of any blot in his own scutcheon. How he would wither if one said to him : ‘Thou Bastard !’ And yet I gravely doubt whether this discreet madam, his mother, has not one day tripped.

'What know you of my youth, girl?' cried she a while ago, white, as I thought, with anger; but it was fear, it seems. She comes here alone to find out for herself by study what secret course to follow, or what hidden dangers to avoid, having no counsellor in whom she can confide. That seems so far certain, or she would surely ask her son himself, being a lawyer, or that wise Mr Arthur Haldane, whom I so honestly dislike, for their advice. It may be all this bodes as ill for Walter as for his brother; it may be that it bodes the younger the best of fortune, and the elder the worst. That would be a brave day, indeed, for some one, on which the proud young baronet should sink to plain Mr Richard, and the poor captain rise to be Sir Walter Lisgard! And, again, there

may be nothing in all this, after all. Time will doubtless shew, and it shall be my task to hurry Time's footsteps towards the discovery."

CHAPTER XI.

U P E A R L Y.

IT has been justly observed that one half of the world does not know how the other half lives. The statement is a very safe one, and might have been made a great deal more comprehensive by the philosopher who uttered it without risking his reputation for sagacity. We do not know how our next-door neighbour lives, except in the sense of what he has for dinner, which may indeed be discovered by the curious; nay, we often know not how our own household lives, how

our very sons conduct themselves when not at meal-times and under our very eyes, what pursuits they really follow, what hopes, what fears, what ambitions they in secret entertain. It is well, indeed, and should be a matter of congratulation, if we are quite cognizant of the “goings on” of our wives and daughters. It is strange to think what a world in little lies under the roof of any great mansion, such as Mirk Abbey. How interesting would the genuine individual biographies—if one could only get at them—of such a household be, from that of the mistress of the establishment (whose troubles we are endeavouring to portray) down to that of the under kitchen-maid, concerning whom we have “no information,” but who has doubtless her own temptations, wrongs, and troubles also, which concern her with

equal nearness, although they may not be so genteel ! It is probable that the true history of the second gravedigger in *Hamlet* would be to the full as interesting as what we know of that philosophic Prince himself, though *his* father had not been murdered by his uncle, albeit even that may have been the case, for aught we know. But, alas ! the novelist has not the power which the *Devil on Two Sticks* possessed of lifting the tiles off the attics ; but has generally to content himself with such glimpses as he can obtain through the keyholes of the first and second floors.

Taking advantage of even this moderate privilege, we are sometimes rewarded with phenomena. Thus, it is little less than a portent to see Captain Walter Lisgard, who is not generally addicted to early rising, up

and dressed upon a certain May morning before the clock on the great stairs has sounded three. True, he has been out of bed once or twice at such an hour on other occasions, but then it was because he had not retired to rest the night before. He has done that, however, this time, or, at all events, has exchanged his evening-dress for morning-costume. Some people do get up at the most premature hours, even in winter, and light their own fires, and retrim the midnight lamp to pursue literary or scientific labours ; but if Captain Lisgard has got up to study, we will eat him. What *can* he be about ? He gropes his way down the great staircase, where darkness is made visible by streaks of grayish light—which is not yet dawn—struggling through cracks and crannies ; and he stumbles over the heavy

rug beneath the bottom step, and swears with involuntary emphasis. Then he listens a while, to see what will come of that. The great clock on the hall-table ticks reprovingly : “Don’t, don’t—shame, shame !” as he never heard it tick before ; and hear and there breaks forth an expostulatory creaking, as though from moral furniture, which has no such scruples in the day-time ; but his ejaculation has aroused no living being.

Softly he turns the key of the front-door, softly withdraws the bolts, and would as softly have slipped out, but that there is suddenly a jar and a whir, and the opening door is held fast by an iron hand. “Confound the chain !” exclaims the captain. “It is as difficult to get out of this house as out of Newgate.” Then, when all is still

quiet, he emerges upon the stone steps with an “I wonder, for my part, how burglars are ever discovered,” and takes his way towards the village. The gates are locked at the end of the avenue, and the porter and his wife are doubtless fast asleep, as well as fair-haired Polly—dreaming perhaps of himself, thinks the captain with a half-contemptuous, half-complacent smile—but Master Walter, who is as active as a cat, climbs the stone pillar by help of the iron hinge, and “drops” noiselessly on to the road. He passes up the humble street, where each cottage is quiet as the grave—two blessed hours intervening yet between its inmates and their toil, and makes for the *Lisgard Arms*. The inn stands on a slight elevation, so that he sees it some time before he nears it. “Why, the place is

on fire!" mutters the captain; and certainly there is some extraordinary illumination taking place in one of the apartments. A flood of light pours from it as from some Pharos, as though to beckon benighted folks whither good ale is to be found; and yet the house is always shut at eleven, in conformity with the squire's orders.

"It's that infernal idiot Derrick himself who has done it," continues the captain. "That's his room, I know. Just as if he could not have got up in the dark, as I did: a fellow that probably never had more than a farthing-dip to light him any morning, before he went to Cariboo. I wonder, for my part, he can dress without a valet. What a stuck-up, vulgar dog it is! How I hate his pinchbeck ostentation, and still worse, his dreadful familiarity! If it could only be found out

immediately after this Derby that he was a returned transport, with five-and-twenty years or so of his sentence still unexpired, how delightful it would be! I really think that he is least objectionable in the evenings, when he is drunk. There is something original in his brute-manner of swilling; a sort of over-driven-ox style about his stagger, which would make his fortune upon any stage—where there was room enough for the magnitude of the exhibition. Certainly, one has to pay for the society of this sort of gentry, and still more for their friendship. Alas, that I should have made this fortunate savage fond of me! I wish I could feel as Valentine did with Orson, instead of being much more like the too ingenuous Frankenstein, whose monster became his master. However, that has not come about yet—notwithstanding meddling Mr Arthur

Haldane's warnings.—Let me see, it was arranged, I think, that I was to whistle to this animal." Master Walter drew a silver cab-call from his pocket, and executed upon it the disconsolate cry of one who in London streets between the closing of the night-houses and the rising of the sun desires a Hansom. Instantly the light from the inn began to diminish—once, twice, thrice; and then the casement became blind and rayless like the other windows. "That beggar had four candles lit!" ejaculated the captain with irritation. "It was a mercy that he did not bring out the village fire-engine! Here he comes with his eternal pipe, too. I daresay he had the imprudence to light *that* before he left the house, and Steve's red nose will smell it."

There are some men who always look the same no matter at what hour you come

upon them : fresh, and hearty, and strong, they have but to duck their heads in cold water, and straightway the fatigues of a weary day or a sleepless night are utterly obliterated. They rejoice like giants to run their courses without any sort of preparation in the way of food and sleep, such as the rest of mankind require. Against this healthy animalism we protest, by calling it rude health ; and to those who are of a less powerful constitution, it is naturally an offensive spectacle. Walter Lisgard had himself by no means a delicate organisation ; his complexion, though pale, was far from sickly ; his limbs, though models of grace rather than of strength, were of good proportions and well knit. But he was conscious of looking heavy-eyed and haggard, and he secretly resented the

robust and florid appearance of the unconscious individual who now joined him—a man at least twenty-five years his senior.

“I suppose you have been accustomed to get up at these unearthly hours at the gold-diggings, that you look so disagreeably wide-awake, Mr Derrick,” grumbled he. “You would very much oblige me if you would but yawn.”

“Get up! Master Walter; why, I’ve never been to bed,” answered the bearded man with a great guffaw. “The fact is, that I took a little more than was good for me last night, and I did not dare lie down, knowing that we had this business on hand so early.”

“Why, one would think, by the amount of light, that you had been lying in state,

like some deceased king of the Cannibal Islands," returned the other peevishly. "Was it your habit to use two pair of candles in your bedroom in Cariboo?"

"Well, I never had a bedroom there, that you would call such, as I have told you again and again, Master Walter; but I have burned twenty candles at a time when they were selling at Antler Creek at five dollars a pound. You imagine, I suppose, that it is only you gentlemen who live at home at ease who have money to spend; but let me tell you that is not the case. I will go bail for my part, for example, that I have paid more sovereigns away in twenty-four hours than your brother, Sir Richard, ever did in a week."

"My dear Mr Derrick, you are boastful this morning," said the captain quietly:

“it is my belief that you have taken a hair of the dog that bit you overnight.”

“Maybe I have, and maybe I haven’t, Master Walter; but I shall burn just as many candles as I like. I have worked hard enough for my money, and, dam’mee, but I’ll enjoy it. Why, when I was at New Westminster, I had my horse shod with gold, sir; and if I choose, I’ll do it here.”

“You would have a perfect right so to do, Mr Derrick,” returned the other gravely; “and for my part, if your horse should cast a shoe in my neighbourhood, I should warmly applaud your expensive tastes. But you must have been really very rich, to do such things. Now, how much do you think you were worth when you were at New Westminster?”

“That’s tellings, captain,” responded the other with a cunning chuckle; “but when I was on Fraser River, me and my mate Blanquette, we made”—

“Well, now, what *did* you make?” urged the young man, as the other hesitated.

“Well, we made nothing for the first five days,” answered Derrick drily—“nothing at all.—How far have we got to go to reach the Measured Mile by this road?”

The two men had left the village, and were pursuing a winding chalk-road that led, but not directly, to the Downlands at the back of Mr Chifney’s stables.

“It is a very circuitous route,” returned Master Walter frankly; “and I was in hopes it might be shortened to the fancy by hearing you tell something of your own story.

But, of course, I have no wish to press you to tell it against your will. You have conferred obligations upon me enough already, I am quite aware."

This was the first sentence of conciliation, not to say of civility, that the young man had spoken, and heretofore his air had been cross or cynical; yet no sooner did he evince this little of good-will, than the manner of the other softened at once to a degree that was very remarkable in so rough a man.

"Don't talk of obligations, lad, for I like you—ay, so well, that I wish you were son of mine; not that I am fit to be the father of such as you either; I *know* that well."

"If I were your son, I am afraid you would have a good deal of trouble with me,

Mr Derrick," replied the young man laughing: "I am not a good boy."

"That is true, Walter Lisgard; and yet I never saw a face that took my liking as yours does—save once. I could not tell what drew me so towards you, when I first met you up at the Farm yonder; but now I know very well."

"Then it is to the similarity between myself and some other favoured individual that I am indebted for your regard? That rather robs the compliment of its flavour."

"Ay, my lad; but you are dear to me for your own sake also, although, indeed, I scarce know why."

"Thank you, Mr Derrick."

"True," continued the other thoughtfully, without noticing his companion's flippant

tone, "you are like—ah, Heaven, how like you are to one that's dead and gone! Indeed, I can refuse you nothing while I think upon it. It is not everybody, however, lad, to whom I would humour by telling exactly what I am worth. While a man is merely known as rich, he may have any sum, and be looked up to accordingly; but when his wealth can be reckoned to a pound, he loses credit. If *Manylaws* wins at Epsom, I shall be worth—ay, near a hundred thousand pounds."

"I suppose no one in Cariboo ever made a sum like that by gold-digging, eh?"

"I think no one, Master Walter. There was no claim so rich as my mate's and mine at Snowy Creek, and it did not yield that sum. But, by Heaven, how well I remember what it did yield. It seemed to

me then that I should never run risks any more, but live on what I had in content and plenty; and yet here I am, this very morning"—

"My dear sir," interrupted his companion gaily, "it appears to me that you are taking gloomy views. What is life without excitement?"

"Ay, that is very well for *you*, lad, who have something to fall back upon, if your little schemes should miscarry. Excitement in your case is only another name for amusement; but in mine"—

"Well, in yours, Mr Derrick?"

"Do not call me Mister; call me Ralph, lad—that is, if you are not ashamed of me altogether.—You *are* ashamed, I see. Well, never mind.—Let me see, I was speaking of Cariboo, was I not? Well, success or failure

there was a question of life and death. One might be a beggar, or one might be the king of the colony. I had known what poverty was—and that is not merely being without money, mind. I have lived among a savage people for months who had neither gold nor silver—nothing to hoard and nothing to spend save shells picked up on the sea-shore, and strung on sea-weed for a purse; and I was as poor as they; but yet it was not poverty. But I had felt the sting of that in many a crowded city, and I came to Cariboo to escape from it. If I should make my thousand pounds or so, I would buy a farm, or a share in a ship, and live a quiet respectable life to the end of my days. While making these good resolutions, my ready money—which was also all I had in the world—was melting fast. With the last ten pounds of it, I bought the

half of a small claim at Snowy Creek. Blanquette and I sawed our own lumber and made our own sluices. It was no light work even for me, who had been used to rough it. There was twelve feet of top-stripping to be removed before we could hope to reach the pay-dirt. For the first five days, we made nothing. I would have sold my share in the whole concern for a couple of pounds, and begun life with that afresh; but on the sixth day we found fourteen ounces of gold, and I was worth fifty pounds. Then I would not have sold my chance for scarcely any sum that you could name. I would have shot any man that had jumped into our pit, spade in hand, just as I would have shot a dog. Your brother, Sir Richard, may talk about the rights of property, but he never appreciated them as I did then. On the

seventh day, we found forty-five ounces; on the eighth, sixty. The find kept on increasing, till it rose to four hundred ounces daily, when we employed eight hands to clear away the tailings. The whole area of the place out of which I scooped my fortune was not eighty feet by twenty. I found for my share twelve thousand pounds in it."

"And you brought that safe to England, did you?"

"No, lad, I did not. I spent five hundred pounds of it in champagne—we drank it out of buckets—for one item."

"And in candles, Ralph," asked Master Walter smiling—"how much in candles?"

"In one thing and another, dear lad, I spent four thousand pounds before we landed in England. Even what was left would have seemed affluence six months

before—— But there, what's the good of talking? There's the rubbing-down house, is it not? and I shall soon know whether I am going to get a second fortune, or to lose what I have."

CHAPTER XII.

THE TRIAL.

THE sun had risen, and the long waste of Down stretched far and wide on all sides; a broad and level track as smooth as any lawn, with here and there a long but gentle slope, marked the exercising-ground used by Mr Chifney's horses. This glistened in the early rays like a path of silver. But fringing it on one side lay a great patch of gorse, and this quite twinkled with green and gold from the gossamers, whose slender fibres covered it as with a veil. The air was fresh

and odorous with a hundred pleasant scents and in the distant vale the morning mists were lifting from field and farm, from tower and town, as at the command of some enchanter. Nothing was heard but the occasional “tink, tink” of a sheep-bell from the still sleeping folds. It was a scene to charm eye and ear; but Captain Walter Lisgard of the 104th Dragoons, and Mr Derrick from Cariboo, were persons upon whom the Dawn and its concomitants were a good deal thrown away.

“ You are sure this is the right place?” inquired the Colonist as they reached a long low-shuttered building, half brick half wood, where the horses were wont to be rubbed down after their gallops:

“ Ay, this is it right enough,” was the reply. “ I dare say they are all inside there waiting

for us. It does not do to be seen at this sort of work. Yes, here they are."

Inside the doorway of the shed in question stood Mr Tite Chifney, in company with a gentleman of advanced years, in a white greatcoat and a new broad-brimmed hat, somewhat resembling a bishop's.

"How are you, Lisgard?"

"How do you do, my Lord?" were the only salutations that passed between the members of the two parties, who had met entirely upon business.

"Come and beat the furze with me, will you, Derrick? the captain has not his gaiters on. It is well to make quite sure that we are all alone before we begin," said the horse-trainer. The two men accordingly stepped into the gorse, and commenced walking through it in parallel lines, as though in pursuit of game.

When he came to a patch of gorse a little higher and thicker than the rest, Mr Chifney struck it violently with his foot as if for rabbits. All of a sudden, there was a violent ejaculation from Derrick; he threw himself down upon some crouching object, and then came a struggle and a choking scream. "Hollo, don't kill the fellow," exclaimed Chifney running up. "See, he's black in the face, man.—Master Walter, my Lord—help, here, help!"

The two men who had been left in the rubbing-house came quickly forward, but it took the combined strength of all three of them to release the poor wretch from the powerful grasp of the Cariboo miner.

"Damn the rogue; I'll teach him to come spying here," cried he, nodding with his head towards a shattered telescope, upon

which he had just stamped his foot. "I'll squeeze his throat for him."

"You seem to have done that already, sir," said the man in the broad-brim coolly; "a very little more of it, and you would probably have had *your* throat squeezed for you by the hangman. Poor devil, he doesn't seem to have much beside his life belonging to him, so that it would be hard to take that."

A wretched object, clothed in ragged black, and with wisps of straw for shoes, wet with the dew amid which he had been lying, and shivering with pain and fear, hear crawled to the last speaker's feet.

"Don't let 'em murder me, my Lord. They *will*, if you don't interfere," screamed the wretched "tout," whose mission it was to procure racing intelligence under difficulties

of this sort, but who had been fairly cowed by Derrick's rage and violence. "I swear to you that I will never tell a soul that I have seen your lordship"—

"Quiet, fool!" interrupted the other sternly, "unless you want to have your lying tongue cut out.—It's bad enough," whispered he to the trainer, "that he should have seen *me* hear; but do you think he has seen the horses?"

"That's quite certain, my Lord," returned the trainer coolly; "and this is a mouth as can't be shut about that matter. But he shall see nothing more of this morning's work.—Come here, you sir."

Taking the trembling wretch by the collar, he led him to the edge of the furze, and, having securely tied his arms and legs, enveloped his head in a horse-cloth which he brought out of the rubbing-house. From the

same building there now emerged two horses, not in the clothes in which exercise was generally taken, but ready in all respects for racing, and ridden not by stable-boys as usual, but by regular jockeys.

“There is no question about it but the bay is the best-looking, my Lord,” said the trainer, in answer to something that had been addressed to him; “but handsome is as handsome does. You would not thank me for praising *The King* on Epsom Downs, after he had been beaten by an outsider such as yonder horse.”

“Who rides the creature?” inquired the other sharply, and looking contemptuously towards the clumsy black, who was no other than our old friend *Menelaus*. “Dam’mee if he don’t look more fit for a hearse than a race-course.”

“Jack Withers, my Lord—a man that was with him in France, and thoroughly understands what the horse can do ; and, indeed, there is no other that *can* ride him as should be. That’s the worst of these foreign horses—they are so full of tricks. I’ve known that black stand stock-still in his gallops, and shoot his boy off just like a rocket. He can’t abide a strange seat.”

“Of course Withers rides him in the great race,” observed the other thoughtfully.

“Certainly, my Lord, just as Tom Uxbridge here will mount *The King*. What’s the good of having a trial-race unless with the same jocks as is to ride them afterwards ?—Starting from that white post, up the rise yonder, round the fir clump, and so back again, is the Derby course to a yard.—Master Walter and Mr Derrick, will you be

so good as to bear a hand, and help me out with the steps?"

"Ain't the gentleman in the broad-brim going to use them as well as me?" observed the Colonist insolently, and keeping his hands resolutely in his pockets. "I never engaged myself to be his body-servant, as I know on."

There being no answer to this appeal, Captain Lisgard and the trainer once more entered the rubbing-house, and reappeared dragging with them a movable platform upon wheels, and furnished with a flight of steps after the manner of a pulpit. From the top of this, one might see the whole course from end to end, and upon it the four spectators took their station close to the starting-post.

"Now, my lads, are you both ready?"

inquired the trainer of the jockeys, who were getting their fuming horses into line. “This handkerchief will serve for a flag, and when I drop it, let there be no false starts. One, two, three—now OFF !”

As the handkerchief left his fingers, the bay and black leaped forward as with a single impulse; the next moment each had got into his stride, and was away like the wind.

“It is amazing how they keep together,” muttered his Lordship in an uneasy tone: “I should not have thought the Frenchman had had such speed in him.”

“It is the hill which will decide the matter, my Lord,” returned the trainer in a low tone; “the ground is rising already. There! and see, the black draws ahead.”

“Ay, the black has it!” cried Derrick with

a frightful imprecation. "I will lay fifty pounds to ten on *Manylaws*."

"I take you, sir," said the man in the broad-brim coolly, as with race-glass in hand he watched every movement of the horses who were now nearing the fir-clump: "there has something happened to that big-boned animal of yours, I fear. What is it, Chifney?"

He was about to pass the glass to the trainer, but Derrick roughly tore it from his grasp, and applied it to his own eyes. "It's one of his infernal jibs," exclaimed he; "and yet— Well done, Jack Withers; that's a five-pound note in *your* pocket.—Perhaps you'd like to look again, my Lord, for their position is a little altered."

"The black is gaining fast," ejaculated Captain Lisgard, his pale face aglow with

excitement. “He has recovered all he lost by that false step. What a pace they are coming down the hill! By Heaven, *The King* is beaten! Tom is using the whip.”

“Just what I expected,” murmured the trainer.

There was a thunder of hoofs, the smack of a whip again and again, a flash of colour—first black, then bay—and the trial-race was over.

“In a second and a half less time than the last Derby,” said his Lordship drily, after consulting his stop-watch.

“I think I did not bring you here for nothing, my Lord,” said the trainer confidentially.

“Certainly not, Mr Chifney,” returned the other bitterly: “I find myself a poorer man than I had thought to be three minutes

ago by fifty thousand pounds. Moreover, I have made the acquaintance of one of the greatest ruffians that I have ever met even upon a race-course. It is altogether an excellent morning's work."

"It would have been worse for you, my Lord, if you had not come," answered the trainer with some stiffness; "you would not have thanked me if you had seen this for the first time on Epsom Downs."

"Very true—very true, Mr Chifney. But you must excuse my feeling a little annoyed by the results of this gallop. And as for this gentleman with the beard—when he has done shaking his hands with his jockey—Here are two five-pound notes for you, sir—the amount of my bet."

"Keep it yourself, my Lord," exclaimed Derrick, waving his hat round and round in

frantic joy. "Or stay, if you're too proud.—Here, Jack, is a fiver for you; and here, you poor devil in the horse-cloth, here's another for you, to heal your windpipe, which, I believe, I squeezed a little too hard a while ago. If the race had gone agen me, you'd never have got a shilling of compensation, so you may thank *Manylaws*."

The trainer's hand was clapped upon the incautious gold-digger's mouth with considerable emphasis, but it arrived too late. "The cat was out of the bag." The tout had learned the very piece of intelligence to obtain which he had gone through so much.

Bound and bruised, and in evil plight as he was, the fellow could not help indulging in a sly chuckle, while his four enemies (for

the jockeys were already in the rubbing-down house attending to their panting steeds) regarded one another with looks of blank dismay.

“You have done it now, Mr Derrick,” observed the trainer lugubriously. “We shall never get thirty to one—no, nor ten to one—against *Menelaus* again.—Great Heaven! why, you wouldn’t kill the man!”

The gold-digger had drawn a clasp-knife, half dagger, half cutting-tool, from his pocket, and was quietly feeling the point of it with his thumb. “I have done wrong,” said he, “but it is a wrong which is not without remedy. No, I am not going to murder this gentleman—at least not now; but I have something of importance to tell him.—Look you here, Mr Tout. I am not a respectable person any more than yourself,

in a general way ; but there is probably this difference between us—I am a man of my word. What I *say*, I will do, I always *do* do, at all hazards. If a man robs another of his gold in the place where I come from, we shoot him : it mayn't be right, but that is the principle on which we act. You will rob me of all I have in the world if you tell what you have seen to-day ; consequently, mark me, if you do tell, *I will kill you*. Of this you may be well assured. That is the only satisfaction which will be left me. You have felt my fingers, but you will in that case feel this knife. I hope I make myself well understood—— No, Master Walter, this is not your business, but a private matter between this person and myself. I want to take a good look at him, so that I may know him again anywhere ; alone

or in company, in England or across seas ; let him be sure I shall find him out ; and I want him to take a good look at me. Mine is not the face of a man who falters in his purpose, or who, having suffered a wrong, puts up with it, I think, and does not revenge himself."

He knelt down, and set his bearded cheek quite close to the luckless tout. Each looked into the other's eyes—one inquiringly, with a half-timid, half-cunning glance ; the other sternly, vengefully, like a judge and executioner in one.

"I will never tell !" quavered the miserable wretch—"s'help me, Heaven, I never will!"

"Yes, you will," returned Derrick coolly ; "I can see that you are a babbler born ; and I don't ask impossibilities. Moreover, it is

but just that you should derive some advantage from my folly. In a week's time, you may tell your employer what you please. In the meanwhile, there is your five pounds. I wish to act as fairly by you as I can; but if the odds rise or fall respecting these two horses within seven days—as they can only do if the result of this trial gets wind—then I shall know where to find a sheath for this knife." With these words he cut the rope that bound the man's arms and legs, pushed the five-pound note into his hands, and bade him be off; whereupon off he shambled.

Neither the trainer nor the man addressed as "my Lord" had stirred or spoken a word during this interview, and Captain Lisgard had only once made a movement as though to interrupt it. All three were well enough

pleased that the gold-digger had taken the task of imposing silence into his own hands. In all likelihood, he was merely threatening the fellow ; and if not, they did not wish to be accessories before the fact to—to any vengeance he might choose to inflict upon the offending tout.

“ Well, gentlemen, we have now six clear days wherein to make our arrangements,” said Derrick, “ and a good deal may be done in that time. True, but for my stupid conduct, we might have had more time before us ; but I have made what amends lies in my power.”

“ You believe, then, that yonder rascal will keep his word, do you ? ” inquired the trainer incredulously.

“ I think so, Mr Chifney. I shall certainly keep mine,” returned the other gravely.—

“Master Walter, we had better be moving home.”

At these words, the party separated—like men who have each their work to do, and are glad to be quit of their companions, in order that they may set about it—with no more ceremony than a parting nod. The man in the broad-brim rode away upon a shooting-pony, which awaited him in the rubbing-down house. The jockeys paced slowly towards their stables, each horse now clothed and visored as though it had been merely out for early exercise; while Mr Chifney walked briskly homeward by another route.

Derrick and Captain Lisgard returned together by the way they came, and plodded on for some time in total silence.

“You will put all your money upon the black un now, I fancy, Master Walter?”

observed the gold-digger at last, as they drew near the village.

"I have done that already," replied the young man frankly. "I was thinking rather of hedging when the odds fall."

"Nay, do not do that, lad," rejoined the other earnestly; "the thing is a certainty. *The King* was the only horse that we had to fear. On the contrary, my advice is, 'Put the Pot on.'"

"The Pot *is* on, with all I have to put in it, Mr Derrick. You forget that I am not an eldest son, and nobody lends money to a younger."

"Ay, true; there's that confounded stuck-up coxcomb, Sir Richard. But look here, my lad. In this pocket-book I carry all I am worth in the world, for in Cariboo there are no banks, and a man at my time of life does not readily change his habits. Here are

five hundred pounds entirely at your service. Nay, I told you that I had taken a liking to you, and I would give them to you right-away, only I suppose you are too proud to accept them, save as a loan."

"Mr Derrick—Ralph—you are very, very kind," said the young man hesitatingly; "but this is a large sum."

"At the present prices, it is ten thousand pounds if *Manylaws* wins," replied the gold-digger, rubbing his hands; "and if *Manylaws* does not win—well, I shall not, I hope, be an importunate creditor. I do not say: 'Do not thank me,' lad, for I like you to smile like that. You are very, very welcome. But here we part; you to your home and friends, and I—well, I am used to be alone. I shall not see a friend's face again till I see yours. Good-bye, dear lad, good-bye."

With a hearty hand-shake and more thanks, Master Walter strode gaily away through the still slumbering village, reclimbed the avenue gate, and let himself noiselessly in at the front-door. As he passed on tiptoe along a gallery, on one side of which lay his sister's apartment, and on the other that of Miss Rose Aynton's, a door opened, and an anxious voice whispered: "What news, Walter?" "Good news," replied he in the same cautious tone, and glided on to his own room.

CHAPTER XIII.

AT SIR ROBERT'S GRAVE.

IT had been observed, as I have already said, that my Lady had not left the Abbey grounds for these many weeks ; but there had been one exception to that course of conduct. She had never omitted to visit, as usual, her late husband's grave, and to lay upon it a posy of spring-flowers, gathered by her own hands ; but she did this now in the evening, instead of the daytime, as heretofore. It was not, however, likely that any intruder should be found there at any hour.

Whoever of the household saw her walking in the direction of the little church—only a stone's-throw from the servants' offices—took great care to avoid her, or to appear, if they needs must meet her, unconscious of her errand; and while she was there, no domestic used the little zigzag path among the grass-grown graves that formed the short-cut to the village. The country folk were forbidden at all times to approach the Abbey by that way, so the sacred spot was almost as private as though it had been an appendage of the Abbey itself, as it had been in the old times. Mirk lay quite out of the high-road, so that no stranger “stretching his legs,” while the coach changed horses, ever strolled into its God's-acre to spend a profitless five minutes amid its solemn records; nor, indeed, was there anything in the grave-

ground, whatever might have been in the church, to attract such persons, in the way of monument or effigy. Yet the humble graves were all well kept; not broken or dinted in, as one too often sees them in such places; nor did the head-stones lean this way and that, as though they strove to wrench up the very mounds they were set to mark; nor were the long rank grasses and the nettles permitted to overgrow the spot, and hide it from the sun. Upon every slab, however, save one, time was doing its work, covering with moss and lichen the gray surface, and filling up the letters on the stones—just as in the hearts of the survivors it was healing the sense of loss, and effacing the memory of the departed one. The sole exception was the stone which commemorated Sir Robert's death. His marble cross was

without speck or flaw. It stood in the western corner, in a little plot of garden-ground of its own, and beside it was a vacant space, left there by his widow's desire, that she might herself be laid there when God's good time should come.

It is the evening of the day upon which Master Walter got up so early, and my Lady has come, as usual, to her husband's tomb. Her hand is resting on the top of it, whereon she has just hung a chaplet of fresh-gathered flowers ; but her look is fixed upon the western sky, where the glory of the sunken sun yet lingers. It may be but a simple faith that associates Heaven with the sky, but it is a very natural one. My Lady's soul was longing to be at rest somewhere beyond those quiet clouds which flecked that golden deep. Death is not so invariably

hateful to us as the divines would paint it ; it has no terrors for the Good—nay, sometimes not for the Bad either—while to the Wretched it would often be more welcome than the dawn. “If I could only ‘fall asleep,’ as is said of the saints,” thought my Lady, “here, and at this instant, how well for all would it be ! Some only live for others, they say, but the best that could possibly happen to all I love would be that I should be laid in my grave. And some have died for others, as God knows I would die for any one of my dear ones, and yet it would be sin in me to die. Ah, husband, husband ! thou that liest here under the flowers and the sky, I would to Heaven that I could lie down beside thee now, and never wake ! I trust thou dost not know this thing that troubles me, and

threatens mine and thine, or thy dear heart would be wrung with pity, although thou wert an angel and in eternal bliss. And but that the Almighty has fixed his canon against self-slaughter—— Those were happy days in which I first read that!” mused she, interrupting herself, and carried involuntarily into another current of thought; “we read it together, you and I, Robert. My new life was just beginning then; never had pupil such a kindly teacher as thou wert. I can bear to think of that; but of thy love, thy noble generous love, thy patient tenderness—— Spare me, great Heaven! I did so worship this dead man, and now I live alone; and yet I would not have him here alive, to know what I know, to feel what I feel, to dread what I dread——no, not though we should be permitted to live

together for years, and die within the self-same hour, as I used to pray we might. I thank thee, merciful God, that I am bearing this heavy cross alone; give me strength to carry it, and suffer me to do so—if it please thee—to the end, alone. It is my fault, husband; all mine. When you pressed me to marry you, and I said 'No,' I should have said it more firmly. We were not fit for one another.—No, no; not that! I will not say that. You made me what I am; a wife fit for yourself, I do believe; not good, like you—not wise, like you—but one who was a faithful and true helpmate, and with whom you were content. If you could make a sign to me from the earth, or in the air, this moment, I should not be afraid but that it would be one of love. If you, perchance, have

come to know every thought in my heart that was in your time—or if you have read it since you died—or if you read it now—still I should not be afraid! I will endeavour to do my duty still; but ah! how foolish are they who say we always know what *is* our duty! O Robert, what is mine?"

She wrung her hands in pitiful distraction, and throwing herself down by the grave-side, whispered, as though to the deaf ear beneath: "The sea has given up its dead to shame me, and thy children, because of me. What is there for me to do for them except to die?"

"Hollo, missus! what's wrong wi' *you*?" inquired a deep hoarse voice. "Drunk or sober, I never could abide seeing a woman cry."

At such a time and place, the sudden and

unexpected interruption might well have sent a shudder to any woman's heart, and it was no wonder that my Lady trembled in every limb. But she gathered herself together with a great effort, and drawing her thick crape veil over her face, arose, and steadily confronted the intruder.

"Why, it's my Lady herself!" cried the new-comer derisively—"the party as I've promised myself a good look at before I left these diggings. And, dam'me, but now I'll have it. If I'm anyways rude, you will please to put it down to the brandy in which I have been drinking to the very good health of the big black horse. Now, don't be so cursedly proud; your son and I—not Sir Richard, for he's a—— Well, you're his mother, so I won't say what I was agoing to about *him*; but Master Walter, he and I

are great friends.—Now, why do you wince? *He* ain't so high and mighty but that he can borrow money of your humble servant; but there—there's no obligation in that, for I love the lad. He's like—like a dear friend of mine, who was drowned in the sea, years and years ago. Lord, how you do tremble! Why, I'm the last man in the world to hurt a woman, bless you. My nature is altogether soft where they're concerned; and if it were not so, there was a woman once, my Lady, drowned and dead—the same as I was speaking of—for whose sake every woman since has been in my eyes sort of sacred-like; that is, unless I was in drink."

It was painfully evident to my Lady that the person who was speaking to her was in the unhappy condition he had just referred to, for he lurched from side to side

until he had bethought him of steadyng himself by the marble cross ; but there was a sort of pathos in his voice, too, which was not the mere maudlin tenderness of the drunkard. If he had not been drunk, he might not have been tender, but there was evidently genuine feeling in the man, which seemed to deepen as he went on. "Now, though you do not speak, I know you're sorry for me. If I should lift your veil—there, I'm not agoing to do it—I am sure you would have a tear for a poor fellow who has been knocked about the world for three parts of his life, and has not made a single friend—not one, not one ; and if he went back home, who would not see a face he knew—it is so long ago that he was there—and who needs a woman's voice to comfort him if ever a man did."

“What’s all this to me, sir?” asked my Lady in low and broken tones. “I wish to be left alone here—by this grave.”

“What—is—all—this—to *you*?” returned the man with vindictive deliberation. “Have you no heart, then, you proud woman, like your eldest son?” Then once more altering his manner, he continued: “Now, do not be angry with me, or you may be sorry for it, but rather pity me. This grave contains what is dear to you, it seems; but you have those alive who love you also! Now, I have not even a grave. The only creature on earth who ever loved *me*—and I loved her too, ah how dearly, though I could not keep even then from drink—she lies buried beneath the stormy waves. I cannot come, as you can, to this tomb, and say: ‘Here she sleeps,’ and weep over it, and be sorry for

my sins, for I know not where, in all the waste of ocean, her bones may lie. So, for many years I never looked upon the sea without the sense that I was looking upon one great grave. Am I speaking truth or not?"

He stopped and clutched her by the arm, and fiercely bade her tell him if she believed his words or no.

"I do believe you, sir," returned my Lady firmly. "Beneath your bronzed and bearded face, I see your woes at work, and I am sorry for you."

"Thank you, Lady; you have a pleasant and kind voice, with music in it such as I have not heard for many a day. You are sorry for me, but you know not half my woes; I have never told them to any human ear; although at times, when I have been all

alone—upon the treeless prairie, not knowing whether I was on the right track or lost, or on the mountain-top in strange and savage lands, and chiefly when a solitary man on shipboard, keeping watch while others slept—then have I spoken of these things aloud, and asked of Heaven why it used me so. But now—as some black cloud will overpass a mighty plain, and never shed a drop, but presently, on coming on a little valley fenced with round green hills, will straight dissolve in rain, so I, who have been so silent for so long, am moved to speak by you. What magic is this you bear about you, woman? Let me see your face."

"There is no need for that, sir," answered my Lady, stepping back, and motioning with her arm with dignity. "The magic of which you speak lies only in a feeling heart and

an attentive ear. If it is any comfort to you to tell your story, I will gladly listen to it."

"Yes, it seems to be a comfort," replied the other thoughtfully, "although I never cared to speak of it before. You see me, Lady, now, a brawling, drunken wretch—upon whose reckless soul there may be murder, to-morrow or next day, as like as not—but anyhow a broken man. I was not always thus. When I was young, I was a hopeful and hard-working lad enough—only a little thoughtless. I was honest, too, notwithstanding that the law and I fell out; but I was fond of jovial company and good liquor, and what I got at sea—for I had a smack of my own at Bleamouth—that I spent very quickly on shore. If I had had a wife, or even a mother, I think it might have been different; but I had no

relations, or at least none who were my friends. I could not bear advice, and much less interference and dictation, and so, you see, I was alone in the world—until I met with Lucy Meade— You shiver, my Lady. Am I keeping you too long in the night-air?"

Lady Lisgard shook her head, and murmured: "No; go on."

"'Tis thirty years ago this very year—that's many thousand days, and tens of thousand leagues have I sailed since then—and yet, I swear, it seems but yesterday I crossed those water-meadows with my gun—for I was after moorfowl—and came upon her cottage on the Blea. White-walled, white-roofed—for in those parts they paint them so—it nestled under a rocky hill, crested with heather; and in front the river

ran, swollen with recent rains, through a broad weedy flat, and so, between the rounded sand-hills, to the sea. Before the cottage was a porch with honeysuckles trained upon it, and one full-flowering fuchsia upon either side. Then, as I drew near, I saw her sitting in the porch mending her father's net. Ah, Heaven, I see her now!"

The speaker paused and sighed; but looking out into the viewless air, as if upon some picture hung in space, he did not mark my Lady start and clasp her hands, as though some dreadful thing had come upon her suddenly, against which none could help her but only God alone.

"It is a story, Lady Lisgard, that you doubtless know," continued the man, "for even among lords and ladies love will come. I asked her for a drink of water, and she

brought me with it Hope, Resolve, Repentance—I know not what. From that moment forth, I lived my life anew. Then the next day, and the next, I sought the cottage; and when I had won my way with Lucy—that was her name, my Lady—did I tell you?—I pleaded my cause with the old fisherman, her father—her mother being already ours—but for a long time in vain.

“She was his only child, his only prop and stay, and he was proud of her, as well he might have been, for she was gentle of speech as you yourself or any lady born, and scholarly and wise beyond her humble state, and, young as she was, already had had many a suitor; but she had never loved but me. 'Tis like enough you cannot fancy that; but then my former self was not like this.” He pointed to his heart with a scornful gesture, as though

something loathsome had taken the place of what had wont to be there.

“ Besides, the fairest, purest creature upon earth was she, and she took all things for pure. Not that there was much against me either, except that I loved good liquor ; besides, I only drank for pleasure then, and now—— But let that be. Well, we were married. We lived with the old couple at the cottage, as Lucy wished, partly for their sakes, partly, as I have often thought since then, for mine—that I might be kept out of bad company, such as there was plenty of at Bleamouth at that time —poachers, smugglers, and idlers of all sorts. But this was done too late. I have said that the Law and I fell out : that was for poaching —and Curse the law, say I, which rich men make for the poor perforce to break. I never poached after I married, but before that time

I had shot a hare or two; and once—but months ago—there had been a fray with keepers, and I had clubbed my gun, and struck my hardest, like the rest. There had been broken bones on both sides, but the matter had blown over, as I thought, when all of a sudden I received certain news that I was marked for one of the offenders, and that men were coming to take me from my Lucy's arms to jail. I told her this, for I had kept nothing from her all along, and I knew that she had courage, or she would never have married such a man as me; but I forgot, in my selfish roughness, that it is one thing to be brave in things that concern one's self, and another to be able to bear to see others suffer. ‘Ah, Heaven!’ exclaimed she, ‘but this will kill my father! To have his honest house entered by men in search of felons, and

to see his daughter's husband with the gyves upon him—that will be his death, I know.' The auld wife said so likewise.

"They were right, I think, for when we came to break the thing to him, and warn him of what might happen, although all was said to excuse what I had done, and to soften the consequences that might come of it, he raved like one distracted. 'Let him leave my cottage!' cried he; 'he has worked mischief enough already; he has robbed me of my daughter's love, and now he would take from me my good name. Let him leave this honest roof!' 'But where he goes, I must go, father,' replied Lucy, with her arms about the old man's neck; and in the end he was brought to see that it must be so. So I changed my name to that of Derrick, which I bear now,

and fled from home to a great seaport, and there, on board an emigrant-ship bound for the other side of the world, took passage not only for myself and wife, but for her parents. It was agreed that all were to begin life again in a strange land, so that I, too, might begin it once more with that fair start which I had lost in my own country. Thus the poor old man and his wife were torn from the comfortable home that had sheltered them for half a century, and forced in their old age to cross the seas. No, not to cross them: would to Heaven they might have been suffered so to do! It was ordained that I, who had thus far caused their wretchedness, should also be the means of their death. A most terrible storm overtook us at midnight, while yet in sight of lights on English land, and in the midst

of it our vessel sprung a leak. I knew that I had a brave woman for my wife, but then I found she was a heroine; I knew my Lucy was good as she was fair, but then she proved herself an angel. There were men on board who screamed and wailed like children. She never uttered a cry or shed a tear. She felt that she was going to heaven with all she loved (for she always thought the best of every one), and therefore death had no terrors for her. But I—I felt myself a murderer. I did what I could to save the two old people, and got them into the only boat that left the ship; but it had not parted from us twice its length, before it capsized before our eyes.

Lucy had refused to leave me, and when the vessel began to sink, I lashed her to a spar, and then myself; and so for a

little time we floated. But the great waves drenched us through and through, and dashed upon us so that we had hardly time to breathe. The spar was not large enough for both our weights, which sank it too low in the water; and so I secretly unloosed the cords that fastened me, and clambered to my Lucy's side, and kissed her cold wet cheek, and whispered: 'Farewell, Lucy.'"

Here the speaker paused, and covered his rough face. My Lady, too, was deeply moved. For near a minute, neither spoke. Then the man resumed: "I slipped into the sea, and struck out aimlessly enough, but with the instinct of a swimmer. Fool that I was to wish to live!" Again he paused; but this time, to mutter an execration.

“And did not all your care and unselfish love suffice to save her?” asked the listener tenderly.

“No, Lady. She was drowned. I never expected otherwise in such a sea. The whole ship’s company were lost, except myself. When nearly spent, I came upon a huge piece of the wreck, and held on to it till daylight, when I found myself at sea. I would to God that it had not been so! I was nearer Heaven at that time than I have ever been since, and I ought to have perished then, when all which made life precious had already gone: it would have been far better to have died with her, than to live without her. But I did live. After two days and three nights of hunger and thirst, a vessel picked me up, a sodden mass of rags, half-dead and half-mad.

They nursed me and made me well—it was a cruel kindness—and after many days, I was able to tell them what had happened. ‘Ay, then,’ said they, ‘the pilot was right who came to us off Falmouth. It was the *North Star* that went to pieces in the storm; you are the sole survivor, man, of all on board. Nothing came on shore that night, or could have come on such a coast as that, save spars and corpses.’”

There was silence for a minute’s space: the strong man’s chest laboured in vain to give him breath for utterance; in vain his horny hand dashed the big tears from his brown cheeks; they still rained on.

“Alas, poor man!” said my Lady, in a broken and pitiful voice, “I feel for you from my very soul. And when you found your three-weeks’ bride was dead—I think

you said you had married her but three weeks—what then became of *you*?"

"What matters?" asked the man half-angrily. "It mattered nothing even to myself. The vessel took me—it was all one to me whither she was bound—to New South Wales. And in the New World I did indeed begin a new life—but it was a far worse one than in the old. I was reckless, hopeless already, and I was not long in becoming Godless. When that is said, a man's history is the same, wherever he lives, whatever he does, and however he ends."

He stamped his foot upon the ground, as though he would keep down some rising demon, and his voice once more resumed the hoarseness it had exchanged for something almost plaintive throughout his story.

"Ralph, Ralph," began my Lady reprovingly,

and touching his rough sailor's sleeve with her gloved hand——

“And how the devil should you know my name is Ralph?” interrupted the other in blank amazement.

“My maid, Mary Forest, told me it was Ralph,” returned my Lady calmly.

“Did she? Well, that's no reason why *you* should call me by it. However, since you seem to feel so unexpected an interest in your humble servant, I will make bold to ask a favour of you.” His manner was rough and defiant as ever now, like that of a sturdy vagrant soliciting alms of a defenceless woman.

“You are angry with yourself,” said my Lady quietly, “for having given way to feelings which do you honour; that is a base sort of regret indeed. You try to

persuade yourself that I have affected a sympathy which I did not feel, but you do not succeed. I cannot but be interested in one who, with all his faults, has certainly in the hour of death and danger behaved nobly, and who must, I feel assured, have the seeds of good in him yet, despite his wild and despairing talk."

"No, woman, I have not," returned the man with vehemence. "Dismiss that from your mind at once. Ralph Derrick is no hypocrite, whatever he is, and he tells you now that he is a lost man, in the sense which such as you understand it. I don't know why I have spoken to you as I have done just now—some springs of feeling that I had deemed were quite dried up flowed at your voice as they have not done these thirty years—but don't imagine that

I am soft-hearted. I am not a bad fellow when I'm sober, and not put out; but then I'm seldom sober, and I'm very easily put out. Your son, Sir Richard, has put me out, for one. I should be sorry for him if he and I had much to do with one another.—But there, you need not turn so pale; for, for your sake—and for Master Walter's sake, who has got my Lucy's eyes, and look, and voice, God bless him—Sir Richard is safe from me; albeit I have let fly a bullet before now at men who have wronged me less than he has done—an insolent young devil! It was a man like him, one of your landowners, forsooth, whose persecution drove me from my native shore, and drowned my wife and the old couple. Damn all such tyrants, says Ralph Derrick"—

It was difficult to associate the depressed and solemn speaker of a few minutes back with this passionate and lawless man, his huge fingers opening and shutting in nervous excitement, his eyeballs suffused with blood, and each hair of his vast beard, as it seemed, bristling with vengeful fury.

“ You were saying that you wished to ask a favour of me, Mr Derrick ? ” interposed my Lady quietly. “ What is it I can do for you ? ”

“ Well, you can do this,” returned he roughly: “ you can cease to set your waiting-maid, Mary, against me, as you have hitherto done. I am not a bad match for her, as she knows, in point of money ; and if she finds herself able to put up with little starts of temper, and not to grudge me a drop o’ drink at times, why, what is that to you ? ”

"Have you told her, may I ask, of what you have been telling *me*, Mr Derrick?"

"Yes; at least I told her I was a widower; I never felt a call to tell her more; she would not understand, look you. She asked me what this leaden locket was I wear about my neck, with this poor broken piece of stick in it, and something withered clinging to it still, and I told her it was a charm against the ague. Now, you—I'll wager you can tell me what it holds."

"No, not I. How should *I* know?" inquired my Lady hurriedly.

"You *do* know, anyway. This fellow is not the sort of man to carry charms, you think; and all that's sacred to him in the world or out of it hangs on his love that's drowned. This, then, must be some token—were there not fuchsias upon either side the

porch where first they met? There, now, you have it, I can see."

"You plucked, perhaps, a piece of fuchsia when you plighted troth," murmured my Lady.

"Ay, when we plighted troth," answered the other mournfully; "and breaking a twig in twain, all blossoming then, but now —see, dried to dust—each kept a half. I have seen far up the hills in Mexico a piece of the true Cross, that's held to be the richest possession that the Church calls her own in those parts; well, that's not sure; it may be or it mayn't be what they term it; but this poor twig has never been out of my sight or reach, and so I kiss and worship this, my relic, as no devotee can do.—Now, what would Mary Forest say to that? She is not like my Lucy; no, indeed,

no more than I am like the Ralph of those old days ; and if she were, should I be fit for her ? My Lucy married to a drunken, gambling ruffian ! 'Tis blasphemy to think upon it. But as for this wench, your waiting-maid, she and I are suited well enough. She wants a husband, and is willing to take me ; while I, who have been tossed so long on the stormy billows of life, shall be glad to come to anchor. It is you only—she told me so herself—who stand in the way.”

“And would you have me, then, advise this woman—being my faithful friend as well as my servant—to unite her fortunes with a man who, from his own lips I learn, is hopeless, reckless, Godless, a drunkard and a gambler”—

“Hell and Furies !” broke forth the

other impatiently, “will you dare to use what I have just now told you against myself! Beware, beware, proud woman, how you cross a desperate man! Since my life is worthless, as you paint it, you may be sure that I shall hold the risk of losing it lighter than better men: there is nothing that I dare not do to those who cross me.”

“I have no fear for myself, sir, and least of all things, Ralph Derrick, do I fear death,” answered my Lady calmly. “Yet willingly I promise that I will never breathe one syllable to human ear of what you have said to-night.”

“So far so well, my Lady. When I found you here, I was on my way to court your waiting-woman, but she does not expect me. She has written me her answer ‘Yes’ or

‘No’ before this, and I shall get it to-morrow in London: it was agreed between us she should do so. I was to have started to town this afternoon, but I overslept myself—not but that I got up early enough, as Master Walter will witness—and missed the train from Dalwynch. I am going thither to-night; but, in the meantime, I thought I could come back and take a farewell kiss from Mary, and her ‘Yes’ from her own lips. I will receive no other answer, and if such should reach me, I shall know from whom it comes. The matter is in your hands, I know; come, let us part friends.”

“God forbid we should part enemies,” replied my Lady fervently; “I will wrong you in nothing, but be assured I shall do my duty at all hazards.”

“And be assured I shall have my way,

Lady Lisgard, at all risks," returned the other grimly. "Are you too proud to take my hand at parting?"

For a single instant, my Lady hesitated; then reaching out her fingers, they met his own stretched out at fullest length, for the tomb lay between them. They shook hands across Sir Robert Lisgard's grave.

CHAPTER XIV.

ONCE MORE IN MY LADY'S CHAMBER.

AS my Lady left the churchyard by the wicket-gate, she caught the flutter of a female dress that flitted on before her, and vanished in the regions belonging to the domestics. Was it possible that anybody had been a witness to her late interview, or worse, a listener to the conversation? It was in the highest degree improbable, but not impossible. By crouching down behind the low stone wall, next Sir Robert's tomb, a person in the Abbey grounds, without doubt, could have overheard,

and even, with caution, might have watched them. It chilled my Lady's heart to think of it. Yet what could be more unlikely? What servant of hers would have ventured upon such an outrage? Could Mary Forest have so far forgotten herself, actuated by an irrepressible curiosity to hear what her mistress and her lover could have to say to one another at that strange time and place? It was much more probable that some domestic about to use the short-cut through the church-yard, had seen her coming from it, and hastened back, to avoid a meeting. At the same time, the suspicion added to my Lady's troubles.

These were serious and pressing enough already, Heaven help her! and yet, urgent and perilous as they were, it was not of them that she first thought when she

found herself once more in her own room. There are no circumstances, however tremendous, which have power to quench the susceptibilities of women: their feelings must have way, no matter how dangerous the indulgence in them, how immediate the necessity for action. The meshes of a net which threatened destruction to herself and all that were dear to her were closing in around Lady Lisgard, and, calm as she looked, she knew it well—well as the wily salmon that poises motionless, and seemingly unconscious of his peril, in the red pool, below which the fisherman has set the spreading snare; but my Lady turns her back for a little upon the tide of woes that is setting in upon her—a spring-tide that may reach Heaven knows how far—and seeks the inland Past. It is the last

time that she will ever visit it, and therefore she cannot choose but linger there a while, and shed some bitter tears. Her door is locked, for none must see her wishing "Good-bye," and the windows are wide open to the air, which blows the flame of her reading-lamp hither and thither. She needs air, poor lady. A waft of wind that has swept some snowy steppe would have been grateful to her throbbing brow that April night; and as for light, a very little is enough for her purpose. Those few old letters she is reading, taken from a secret drawer in my Lady's desk, are as familiar to her as her prayers, and she seems to hold them almost as sacred. Yet one is not even a letter, but only a piece of folded note-paper, torn at the creases, and yellow—nay, yellower than mere age could possibly have

turned it. It has been damaged by sea-water. Within it are two locks of hair, quite white, and a few words in faded ink, *Frank Meade* and *Rachel Meade*, with a date of five-and-thirty years ago.

She takes out the silver tresses, and looking on them reverently for a few moments, kisses them, and puts them back in the secret drawer—but not the writing; that she holds above the lamp until it has caught fire, and watches it until it is quite consumed, and the last spark has gone out. Then she brings forth from the same hiding-place two letters, evidently both by the same hand—a very unclerkly one—ill-spelled and ill-composed, but which have been to her more dear than any written words for a quarter of a century; for they were letters of a dead man, written, the

one when he was her accepted lover, the other after he became her husband. They are letters of the Dead no longer ; for he who was thought to have died is still alive, and being so, has become an enemy more terrible than any who should seek her life ; one who, by simply saying : “ This is my wife,” would thereby dishonour her, disgrace her children, and even shame the memory of that righteous man whose tomb she had just visited, and wept over with such honest tears. And yet with tenderness, though mixed with a certain awe and shrinking, does my Lady look upon those time-worn words, notwithstanding that the sacredness of Death is no longer on them. The first is what is called a love-letter, a note filled with foolish fondness, expressed with vehemence, but without coarseness ; the second a tissue

of passionate self-reproaches ; the writer accusing himself of bringing a curse upon her happy home in having married her ; then stating, as though reluctantly, certain arrangements he had made at the seaport, from which his communication was dated, for the passage of herself and parents by the *North Star*. Both are signed *Ralph Gavestone*.

“ So loving and so penitent,” murmurs she, “ Time cannot surely have worked so ill with such a nature as he would have me believe ! When he first sang that carol to my ear, I thought it might have been an angel singing :

O'er the hill and o'er the vale
Come three kings together.

Alas, alas ! to think with what terror I heard him sing it the last time. He may not be

more changed within, perhaps, than he is without ; since, notwithstanding what he said about his looks, I knew him again the first moment my eye lit upon him on yonder lawn. I wonder whether he would have known *me*, supposing he had snatched away my veil. Merciful Heaven, what a risk was that ! nay, is not every moment that he remains at Mirk a risk ! What if he heard the name of Gavestone coupled with mine ? I am sure he recognised something in my voice, although I disguised it all I could. He must never come back hither—never, never ! He must be as dead to me now as I deemed him to be before. God knows I pity him from the bottom of my heart : and also"—here she paused—"yes, and also that I do not love him—no, not him, although I love the man that wrote these

words. I never concealed it, no, never, from my—Sir Robert himself. I said : ‘I have no love to give you,’ all along ; ‘only respect, devotion, duty.’ And those, Heaven knows, I gave. If all together, and a hundred other gracious feelings added, could have made up love, then Sir Robert would have had that ; but they can *not*. He knew it, noble heart, and was content. He knew that in that drawer I kept these very things that came on shore with me when —O Ralph, Ralph, Ralph !” My Lady shook with sobs ; and then, in her agony, mistaking the noise of her own passion for some interruption from without, started up from the desk on which she had thrown herself, and listened.

Nothing was to be heard save a faint peal of laughter from the croquet-ground,

where Walter and the two young ladies were endeavouring to play by lantern-light—a frolic she had heard them planning at dinner-time. Yet even that slight tidings from the world without recalled her to the present. “I must burn all proofs,” she murmured, as though repeating some authoritative command of another rather than any determination of her own. Then with a steady hand she took the letters, and burned them to the last atom, reading the words with greediness, as though, as the flame consumed them one by one, the remainder had grown more precious, like the Sibyl’s books. There was more to try her yet. The last thing which the little drawer contained had yet to be brought forth—a leaden locket, the facsimile of the one which Derrick had just shewn to her in the

churchyard. Within, although almost, as he had expressed it, "dried to dust," was a tiny sprig of wood. She emptied this into the hollow of her hand, and instantly the wind whirled all away. My Lady uttered a low moan of anguish, then sat with the poor token in her hand, which, worthless and vacant as it was, yet, to her streaming eyes, held all the treasure of her youth. "Alas, alas, for the time that is no more!" cried she. "Who could have thought that I, with my own hand, should destroy this precious pledge? Kind Heaven, direct me—teach me what it is right to do! Till death should part us, did I swear to cherish him; and now, though we both live, alone he roves the world. It may be I should win him back to his former self, and save a soul alive. He has loved me always—always; and he loves

me now, although he deems I have lain beneath the waves these thirty years, and although he seeks—— But that shall never be. I will tell Mary Forest rather to her face: ‘I myself am married to this man whom you would wed.’ He shall not bring another sin upon himself and shame on her, and—— Ah, Heaven help me; what is that which I should do in this sad strait?’”

It was terrible to see my Lady’s look of woe, as, rising from her chair, she paced the room, and now prayed Heaven for aid, and now stood listening to the mirth that still broke in from out of doors by fits, and now gazed fixedly upon the little leaden case within her hand, as though there were some magic help in *that*. “Farewell, Lucy,” murmured she; “the last words that I ever thought to hear him say, which, having said,

he dropped, to save my life, into the wave. And now I see him storm-tossed in the sea of sin, certain to sink, without a plank but this poor ancient love of his to which to cling, and yet I may not stretch a finger forth to aid him. Ah me, what base return ! Why did I not cleave to him, although I thought him dead, as he to me ? Why was I not faithful to his memory, as he to mine ? Why say : ' In three years' time, Sir Robert, if your fancy still holds firm, I will be yours ? ' Why not repeat that ' No ' I gave him first ? Then, earning my own living as I was born to earn it, I might have lived on alone until this day, when, meeting with my poor lost Ralph once more, I could, without a blush of shame, cry ' Husband ! ' and be to him indeed the guardian angel his love paints I was. Heaven knows, I

wish it for his sake alone. I wish for nothing for myself but Death—yes, that would be best of all, a thousand times."

My Lady's once plump face looked pinched and worn, almost as though the Shadow for which she sighed was really nigh ; her anxious eyes, not softened by her tears, peered timorous as a hare's to left and right, as though the tenantless room held some one who could read her secret soul. Then sitting down upon the sofa, with her hands clenched before her, she stared out upon the twilight, deepening down upon the windmill on the hill. But presently, "Forgive me these black thoughts," prayed she with inward shudder. "If, as they say, the place reserved for the wicked is filled with those who have promised themselves to do some good, and have not done it, then haply those who in

their minds revolve some deadly sin which they do not commit, may be forgiven. I will not, with God's blessing, thus transgress again. I *know* that that is wrong, and prompted by the devil; but which is right and which is wrong in this" (once more her eyes fell piteously upon the locket in her hand)—"Lord help me in this trial."

Here Walter's ringing voice was heard upon the lawn beneath: "Never mind pulling up the rings, Letty; they are the best burglar-trap a householder can lay; only bring in the mallets and balls."

"My Walter!" exclaimed my Lady, starting up with haste. "Have I forgotten *you*, then? My proud Sir Richard, too, disgraced, dishonoured, shall men call you bastard? My sweet Letty—never, never, never!" As though she dared not trust

herself to think, she kept repeating that sad word: then thrusting the dear token in the centre of the wood and coals that were laid in the fireplace ready for the match, she set all alight.

“Better for one to suffer than for three,” she muttered to herself. “The die is cast. I am My Lady still. I would my heart could melt away like this dull lead, and weigh me down no more, and with this last relic of the past, that every thought of it might likewise perish. It can never be, I know. While this my life still holds —a life of lies, a whitened sepulchre—this sting will never lose its venom—never, never!—Shade of the dead,” cried she with vehemence, turning toward the old church-tower, which stood up black against the rising moon, “I charge you, witness what I

do for you and yours ! Here, in this flame, I sacrifice not only this poor token, but the man that was my husband ; nay, who *is*, the man that I once loved, nay, whom I love now ; the man that laid his life down for my sake, with those two words, just 'Farewell, Lucy.' Great Heaven, is not this enough ? Surely, now all will go well —save for him and me. Is this too much to ask ? Forgive, forgive : I know not what I said. Teach me to be humble, patient under every blow, and no more vain regrets. I must act at once. What did Arthur say ? 'The matter lay in my own hands,' said he, whether this man should stay at Mirk or not. How little did he know with what truth he spoke ! And I must speak to Mary without delay, for that I alone could stop her marriage with this

man. How true again? Well, I will do it."

Then my Lady washed her swollen eyes, and smoothed her hair, all tangled and escaped from its sober bonds, unturned the door-key, and having rung her bell, awaited with the lamp so placed that it threw her face in shadow, the coming of her waiting-maid.

END OF VOL. I.

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